The GOLDEN SPUR

J. S. FLETCHER

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THE GOLDEN SPUR

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THE GOLDEN SPUR

"THE GOLDEN SPUR"

CHAPTER I

ADVENTURE OF A JUNE MORNING IN LONDON

WHEN the door finally opened there was vouchsafed to me the vision of my landlady, portentous of mien, unnaturally tall, stout, and unpleasant; a stern piece of realism framed by a cheap beading from which the sham gilt was already beginning to crack. She filled the doorway, and appeared to be occupying most of the dismal passage which stretched away behind her to the regions of mystery. Her expression reminded me in some vague fashion of certain rhymes, strung together, I think, by the late Lord Macaulay, wherein it is narrated in what manner one Horatius announced his strict intention of keeping a narrow thoroughfare against vast numbers who were minded to achieve its passage. I gazed at her admiringly; the heroic age, then, still existed, and was on exhibition in the dreariness of Vauxhall Bridge Road.

"Not in 'ere you don't come, Mr. 'Anmer," said she, in a voice heavily reminiscent of asthma, unsweetened gin, and the cheaper species of shellfish. "Not in 'ere, sir. Sorry I ham to take steps which is unpleasant, but when a gentlemen"—(ah, the emphasis with which she pronounced that important word!)—"when a gentleman don't pay 'is rent, and a poor woman as 'as 'er living to make 'as a chance of lettin' to better advantage, what can be hexpected? An' them's your property, such as they are, Mr. 'Anmer, and good-day to you!"

With a celerity of movement which would have done credit to the slimmest of her sex she suddenly whipped from behind her a sack which too obviously showed the marks of hasty packing, thrust it into my hand, and closed the door in my face. The situation gradually dawned upon me. I was turned out.

I stood a full minute on the doorstep, taking in the full beauty of the event. Something which agitated the sack that hung limply in my hand caused me to look down. A cat, somewhat thinner than myself, was rubbing itself against the knobby corners of the burden which Fate had so unceremoniously thrust upon me. I looked at it for another full minute, then, dragging the sack at my heels, I walked out of the four square yards of garden into the street. My late landlady and her daughter watched me from behind the blinds of the first floor. Nearer the sky their maid-of-all-work glared, wide-eyed and impenitent, through a window which she

had not recently cleaned. I saw her put her finger in her mouth and rub sufficient dirt away to give her a peep-hole; that seen, I turned one way and the cat went another. This was solitude.

What to do with the sack? It was a cheap, common sack: I believe it to have been of that variety which is destined to hold potatoes. . . . It trailed dismally behind me, and people looked at it and then at me, and then at both me and it together. A policeman glanced us over, and seemed inclined to fancy that the sack contained at least a murdered infant. And at last, having walked a hundred yards with the thing trailing mournfully in my immediate rear, it dawned upon me that the situation was somewhat unusual. It is only once in a century, perhaps, that people see a well-dressed gentleman trailing a potato-sack behind him in the public streets.

All that I possessed in the world was in the sack and on my own skin. I had clung to one good suit of clothes, to certain accessories in the way of good boots, smart neckties, good linen, to the very last, and although there was not even one poor penny in my pockets as I went along, trailing my sack in the heedless, uncomprehending dust, I was as trim and well-groomed as any man in London. But the sack! Well, in the sack there was another suit of garments, much worn, some linen, some toilet requisites, a few books, some manuscripts, and two pairs of walking shoes. That was all that was left.

The sack began to bore me. A man cannot trail a sack all about London without arriving at a point where its presence becomes embarrassing. I felt at last that the sack and I must part company. And seeing a shop at hand, on the outer skirts of which hung many frowsy garments of hideous aspect and proportion, I marched into it and dropped the sack on the counter. There was a man behind the counter who read a newspaper. He glanced at me and at the sack and gave signs of faint interest.

I unwound much string from the mouth of the sack and fished out my books and manuscripts. These I placed aside; the rest of the contents of the sack I shook on to the counter.

"How much for the whole boiling?" I asked, sternly.

The man fingered and pulled the things about, becoming interested when he examined the texture of the cloth and the shape of the boots. He held the coat up and looked at it critically.

"That wath made in Thavile Row, that wath," he said, with sudden admiration. "I can tell a thing when I thee it."

"I shall charge you ten per cent extra for your knowledge," I remarked. "Well—how much?"

"Give yer eight bob for the lot," he said, rolling the things together and pushing them aside.

"I will accept ten shillings," I answered, unmoved by the prospect of possessing so much ready money.

He hesitated a moment; then he counted out two half-crowns, four shillings, and two sixpences. When I had placed it in my pocket and gathered up my books and papers, I asked him for a half-penny for the sack.

"Well, th'elp me!" he said, and pushed the coin across the counter. He was searching the sack for holes when I walked out.

There was a second-hand book-shop close at hand, and I carried the books to it and bartered them in exchange for seven shillings and sixpence. But the manuscripts were still an encumbrance. What was to be done with them? That morning, however, I felt Napoleon-like in fertility of invention and in great enterprise, and I was not going to stick at trifles. I went into a stationer's shop, expended threepence on a stout envelope and a bit of sealing wax, made up the things into a neat parcel, and addressed it to myself, Meredith Cosmo Gordon Hanmer, Esquire, at the Buckingham Palace Hotel. Thither I carried it and entrusted it to a most civil person in the office, where it still awaits my coming; itself, dusty and worn, an object of half-formed suspicion.

At last, then, I was free—and I had seventeen shillings and threepence halfpenny in my pocket. What to do now? I learned from a conveniently placed clock that it was half an hour after noon. That, or the fact that I had not breakfasted, caused me to contemplate luncheon with responsive feelings. It was some days since I had

eaten a proper meal, the wherewithal to pay for one not having been in my possession. Well, today I would throw off care, and eat—I would also drink. I would eat and drink, too, of the best—that is, of such best as one may command who possesses seventeen shillings and some pence.

I strolled across the Park, feeling very happy. It was absolutely true that I was homeless, friendless, that I did not possess even a clean collar to put on when my present irreproachable neckgear was taken off. The thing which I had contemplated for so long a time was at last upon me. I had felt that a day must come when I should be cast on the streets: here at last it was! I felt inclined to greet it as one would greet something good which one had long expected; the certainty of it was so much healthier, breezier, cleaner altogether than the dead uncertainty which had gone before it. It was enough to stir one's blood to action to know that at last one stood face to face with the ill-fortune which had been dealing pin-pricks from behind a curtain for so long a time.

Across the Park—along Piccadilly—into Regent Street: the Regent Street of a fine June morning, full of life, colour, vivacious and sparkling. There were the usual things in the windows for the rich to buy and the poor to stare at; there were flowers and flower-like women; and the sunbeams were full of dusty gold. I felt inclined to sing—my silver and copper lay warm in my pocket. And I was going to eat and drink.

I turned into Oxford Street at last, and strolled leisurely towards Frascati's. It had always been a favorite resort of mine ere the evil days had come, and I went back to it as naturally as if I had never ceased to turn my feet towards it. And by good luck, I found that the table at which I had always made a point of sitting in the old days was unoccupied. The place was full. Folk were eating, chatting, laughing; the musicians were making soft dreamy music. But my table was left to me. I took that as a happy omen.

But I had scarce eaten a mouthful when my sole possession of the table which I had come to call mine was disputed. There came gliding in a girl, fair, stately, gracious. She paused near me, looking about her in some slight embarrassment. Then she caught sight of a vacant chair at my table, and at the same instant a waiter caught sight of it and her. She was sitting before me, her face bent over the bill of fare, her bosom slightly agitated, ere I had realized that she had come.

It is one of the greatest curses of our insularity that people foregathering in this fashion may not address each other. I wanted to talk to her as soon as I saw her, there was the promise of rare sympathy in her face; there was common sense too; and there was more than a suspicion of fun and of roguishness. She was a beautiful woman; rich in color, in shape, in femininity. As she dismissed the waiter she raised her face and looked at me. I think we stared at each other for quite

two seconds. The voices of the people, the gay chatter, the low laughter, and the softly-throbbing music seemed to envelop us in a sort of purple mist. I continued to eat and drink.

I was profoundly interested in my table-companion. She had puckered her forehead into whimsical little lines as she considered the question which the waiter's presence inspired, and I knew that, like nineteen out of every twenty women, she gave little attention to the all-important question of food. I was secretly conscious of her every action as she ate a lamb cutlet and a potato, and crumbled a piece of bread to pieces. I knew that, this over, she would ask for an ice—that serpent-prompted temptation of the modern Eve. She ate it thoughtfully and slowly; and that over she sat back in her chair and calmly looked about her. Her eyes were like lakes of unfathomable depth.

She stirred a little at last, and I saw her hand steal round to her pocket. Then with a sudden rising the color flushed about the tendrils of soft hair that clustered on her forehead, and she looked at me involuntarily.

"Oh!" she breathed, "somebody has stolen my purse!"

It was a commonplace remark, but I was thankful for it. I bowed gravely across the table.

"I have often observed that the absurd feminine handbag," I said, "affords the predatory human being excellent chances."

She looked at me as if I were addressing her in a long-forgotten tongue.

"But, surely," she began. "No—it's gone!"

"Madam," I said, leaning forward, "if the loss of your purse is an inconvenience which might be temporarily repaired by the loan of mine, it were an easy matter to return whatever you might then owe me by means of the facilities for remitting money which our postal authorities now afford."

She looked at me curiously, then steadily, then with a severe penetration; and at last she smiled.

"What an absurd way of offering to lend me five and six!" she said. "Do you always talk like that?"

"I endeavor to make my meaning plain, madam," I returned.

She placed her elbows on the table, interlaced her fingers, and looked at me with still stricter attention.

"I am obliged to you," she said, at length. "I accept your offer—rather than suffer the indignity of telling the waiter what he might not choose to believe."

"Of two evils," I said, "it is always well to avoid the greater."

"Then—your purse," she said.

" 'Tis but poorly filled," I said, passing it over.

She took it in her ungloved hands, smiling over it in a whimsical, almost childish fashion. She opened it and gazed contemplatively at the silver lining within.

She abstracted the money she needed, and returned the purse to me with a smile.

"I owe you five shillings and sixpence," she said "And that I may avail myself of those facilities of which you spoke so circumambiently—your address?"

I had prepared myself for this blow. I possessed a card yet, and I drew out my case, put my pencil through the address which had not been mine for a good year, and wrote the name of the hotel at which I had left the manuscripts. I knew that I should never call for the latter; but—I had heard her speak.

She bowed very politely as I gave her the card, and I saluted her with equal respect. She called the waiter and paid him, she began to draw on her gloves slowly and with a meditative air, I continued to eat and drink with the impassive gravity of the unemotional man. All was now over between us.

She stirred a little.

"It seems a poor return for your kindness to say a mere 'good morning,' " she said in a low voice.

"It is sufficient reward, madam, to have been permitted to serve you," I responded with another polite bow.

"How quaintly you talk," she said. "It sounds like—"

"It is mere trickery," I remarked, interrupting her. "Pray give no attention to it." She sighed a little.

"I will post you five shillings and sixpence at

once," she said. "I—suppose I may shake hands with you?"

But before she had stretched out her hand I stopped her.

"I say!" I said. "Don't, please! I—look here, that's been a bit of pretty comedy; don't let's spoil it. You knew I was acting all the time. I—I don't think I ought to—to let you, don't you know!"

"Ah!" she said, drawing a long breath. "I thought you could talk like a sane creature. Well? What else?"

"Absolutely nothing," I replied. "Hadn't you better go?"

She put her elbows on the table, interlaced her fingers again, and, leaning her chin upon them, looked at me until my eyes sought my plate.

"I believe," she said at last, "I believe you are in trouble."

I wanted her to go; things were becoming unpleasant and inconvenient.

"No," I said; "I assure you that I am brilliantly happy. Don't I look so?"

"A woman," she responded, sententiously, "can see things. Ah, yes; I am quite sure of it! Please tell me—I think you might, after I—well, after I was so nice as to let you lend me five shillings and sixpence."

I sat staring at her. I sat with my hands in my pockets, my head bent forward a little, looking up at her.

She kept the same attitude; it became her, and she knew it did.

And then something made me tell her everything. All round about us there was another world; our world was the little table by the pillar and ourselves. And I told her everything.

She said never a word. Only once she caught her breath rather sharply. When I had told her all she sat for some moments staring at me.

"And so," she said, at last, "with seventeen shillings as your all and with no prospect of anything to come, you eat and drink expensive things and offer your purse to persons who have lost their own. Ah!"

"Does it make any difference?" I said. "After all, I am the better for good food and good wine, and I saved you the annoyance of having to tell the waiter that—"

"I had not forgotten," she said. "And now—what comes now?"

"Nothing but leave-taking," I said, rising. "I feel intensely grateful that you have allowed me to tell you all this: yes, confession is good for the soul, after all. You see, when one has no one to confide in—But ought we not to say 'good-bye'?"

"Sit down," she said with an imperative gesture.

I obeyed almost mechanically.

"What do you intend to do when you walk out of this place?" she inquired in a business-like fashion.

Her tone roused me to the old flippancy.

"Madam—" I began.

She stopped me with a look.

"Then I do not know," I said.

She regarded me steadily for a time.

"Call the waiter and pay your bill," she said, presently. She sat immovable, silent, while I counted out all my remaining silver save two shillings. I gave her a look of defiance as I pushed one of them towards the waiter.

"A shilling is all that remains to you," she said.

"At twelve o'clock," I retorted, "I had not even a shilling. And you forget you are sending me five shillings and sixpence."

She continued to regard me very steadily for a time. At last:

"Will you walk a little way with me?" she said. "There is something I would like to say to you."

"All ways are his who has no way at all," I said, laughingly. "I am at any rate presentable."

She looked me up and down, noting my boots and my hat, as we walked out together into the street. I looked at her, too; she had the graceful movement of the healthy woman—free, untrammelled.

"You are strong?" she asked, after we had walked some way.

"As a horse," I made answer.

"And you are not afraid—"

"Of anything," I said.

She nodded her head. For a long while we walked on in silence, I careless of aught but her presence. When she began to talk again it was of things foreign to the recent situation. She talked well, and even brilliantly, and I was content to listen and to give monosyllabic replies to most of what she said. I think she discussed the prospects of peace in South Africa, the merits of some famous tenor then appearing at Covent Garden, and the state of the London streets. We had covered some distance when I suddenly paused and began to laugh, oppressed thereto by the curious incongruity of the situation. It had come upon me with overwhelming force that this was the most ludicrous adventure I had yet encountered in a life which had never been without incident.

CHAPTER II

I AM ASKED TO PLAY AN OLD PART IN A NEW WAY

MY companion looked at me with something like a flash of displeasure illuminating the unfathomable depths of her eyes, and two tiny creases, eloquent of inquisitive feeling, showed themselves about the crimson of her lips. She, too, paused and her foot tapped impatiently upon the pavement.

"Well, sir?" she said.

Her voice, more imperative than questioning, brought me to my senses. I felt myself blush as I expressed my contrition.

"Forgive me," I said, earnestly. "I am afflicted—it is really a genuine complaint—with an unfortunate habit of laughing at anything which strikes me as being curious or uncommon, and—"

"And you think all this as curious as it is uncommon?" she interrupted, briskly.

"Is it not?" I dared to inquire.

"What does that matter?" she replied, calmly. "And, in sober truth, it isn't. I told you, I think, that I had something to say to you?"

"Yes," I said.

"It appears to me that the best place to say it will be within the shelter of four walls," she answered, somewhat coldly. "One does not talk of secret matters in the public streets."

"I believe that is generally recognized," I replied. "This matter, then, is secret?"

"It may be a matter of life and death," she said, calmly, and she stole a look at me which seemed to inquire if this announcement affected me at all.

"Ah!" I said. "Then let us seek the shelter of the four walls."

"My flat is within a few minutes' walk," she said. "I will give you coffee and cigarettes, and ask your advice."

I looked about me, and was somewhat surprised to discover that we had reached the junction of the Edgware and Harrow Roads, and were turning along the latter in the direction of Paddington Green. This is a region with which I have much acquaintance—the mere sight of its dinginess and of the statue of the famous Sarah Siddons, which seems to review every omnibus and vehicle that passes it, redeemed the situation from the cloud of mystery which was threatening to overwhelm it. It was beyond me to conceive of romance waiting to be found amidst the purlieus of Paddington.

"My advice and help are alike at your service," I said as we walked across the Green. "But I fear they are

of little value—you are already aware of my undoubted limitations."

"They may be discussed later," she answered. "Perhaps I can judge of their usefulness better than you. But here we are."

She paused before a block of new residential chambers in St. Mary's Terrace, and pointed to the open doorway with a comical gesture which seemed to imply that she begged my forgiveness for the obvious newness of the place. I bowed gravely.

"It is quite impossible to give new red brick that appearance of antiquity which one most admires in a dwelling-house," I said as we went up the steps and crossed the hall. "Old red-brick houses are admirable in tone, and in conjunction with ivy, jessamine, or wistaria—"

"It is the newness of atmosphere that one objects to chiefly," she said as we stepped into a lift, the door of which was obsequiously opened to us by an attendant. "One seems to smell so much new wood, so much fresh paint, to be unable to escape the suggested presence of the painter and plumber. But you are not to condemn my little *pied-à-terre,* sir—it is my home, and —I bid you welcome."

We had reached the door of a suite of apartments by this time, and as she spoke the last word she touched the button of an electric bell. The door opened—a smartly-dressed maid revealed herself. My mysterious

hostess swept in; I followed, looking about me. We stood within a tiny hall, panelled in dull oak, and lined with old armour. Through an open door I caught glimpses of a pretty drawing-room; from a great rug in one corner of the hall rose a Borzoi hound which came leisurely forward and pushed his muzzle into my hostess's hand. She, with her fingers resting lightly on his head, turned to the maid, who had closed the outer door and stood waiting her mistress's pleasure.

"Miss Smith is still out?" she inquired.

"Yes, madam."

"Take her into the drawing-room when she returns. I shall be engaged for a little time. Mr. Hanmer, will you follow me?"

She opened the door of a room on the left, and preceded me into it. I closed the door and examined my surroundings. The room was small and was evidently used as a library and study. The walls were lined with cabinets full of rare china and glass, and with low bookshelves packed with volumes whose authors were here honored by service of creamy vellum and delicate leather; evidences of taste, refined feeling, of a certain love of luxurious surroundings were abundant; but in the middle of the floor stood a substantial and business-like looking desk, covered with papers, reference books, and the various paraphernalia of a person who has important affairs to transact. I identified it somehow with my hostess, and I looked from her sur-

roundings to herself with increased and increasing interest. She, standing near the desk, was pulling off her gloves with something of impatience, and I fancied that I perceived signs of doubt and perplexity in the expression of her face. She flung the gloves aside, produced a key, unlocked a drawer, and took out a small cash-box. There was a jingle of coins; she looked up at me with a rare smile and laid five shillings and a sixpence before me.

"We must square our accounts first, must we not?" she said, gaily. Then her mood suddenly changed—she swept the cash-box into the drawer again and the lock snapped viciously. "Oh, dear!" she said, with a sigh that was as much born of vexation as of despair. "I don't know if I am doing right—I really don't."

"I believe you wished for my advice," I said.

She faced round upon me with a swiftness that revealed the wonderful grace of her figure. I saw then that however much she might have been playing a part during the preliminary stage of our acquaintance, she was now in a state of sober earnestness.

"I believe I have been abominably rude to you, Mr. Hanmer," she said. "A poor return for your kindness to me! Oh!—I'm in a fix, and I don't know anyone who can advise me properly. It struck me that you—how is it that one seems to recognize these things so quickly in some men?—that you can be trusted, and are a man of at least some resource—"

She stopped and glanced at me in an inquiring fashion. I had continued to regard her steadily. I was becoming puzzled. She had thrown off whatever artificiality might have come into her conversation because of my own studied tricks of speech, and I saw that she was now natural and womanly enough.

"I am to be trusted," I answered. "If you feel disposed to tell me your difficulty I will do what I can. But you forget that I do not even know your name."

She looked at me with round-eyed astonishment.

"How foolish and forgetful I am," she said with a sudden blush that added strangely to her beauty. "But—" she paused and looked at me again, this time with the suspicion of an arch expression, "but—surely you know me—surely you have seen me before?"

"Indeed, no!" I answered.

She lifted her hand and pointed to something behind me. I turned—on the mantelshelf rested two or three large photographs which had evidently just come in from the studio. They were studies of her: beautiful things all of them; and at the foot of each ran the signature in bold, flowing characters, "Selma St. Clair." I looked round at the original.

"Surely you have seen me before?" she said.

"Never," I replied. "I—"

"Well?" she said, questioning me as much with eyes as with tongue.

"I should not have forgotten," I replied.

She smiled and shook her head.

"So much for fame, Mr. Hanmer!" she said. "Ah! I was fool enough to imagine that all the world had seen and heard me at Covent Garden last summer—"

"Ah!" I said. "I understand. Last summer? Yes, of course. But last summer—I had not even half-a-crown to spare for the gallery. Yet—if I had known—"

"Yes?" she said with the question writ large in her smile. "Yes?"

"Had we not better talk about your difficulty, Miss St. Clair?" I asked.

She laughed, nodded, and signed me to sit down. She took a seat near the desk—she touched an electric bell. The smart maid came, received an order for coffee, and retired noiselessly. We who were left looked at each other; I was calm and silent, she, obviously impatient, began drumming the arms of her chair with slender fingers. I waited—she turned upon me at last with a movement of sudden resolve to speak.

"Look here," she said. "I—I am an impulsive creature; I always was,—and I believe you're the very man to help me out of a difficulty. At least—to help me, and —well, and some one else. You see—"

I stopped her with a gesture.

"The some one else," I said, "is of course a woman?"

"A woman?" she exclaimed. "She is a—oh, yes, of course, a woman, Mr. Hanmer. It's not very probable I should want help for myself and a man, is it? Well

—I—what was I saying, oh, about you. I—somehow I formed a sort of notion, a mere idea, you know, when we were at Frascati's, and you had told me of your—well, your present state—that you happen to be exactly the man of whose services I—that is we—stand in need. You have a pleasant contempt for the buffetings of fortune, you can smile when your last shilling is perilously like to depart from you, and you—yes, I must say it—your fortunes are desperate, so desperate indeed, that one may say with justice that it is only by some bold stroke of sword or by some piece of unusual good luck that they will be retrieved. Am I right, Mr. Hanmer?"

"It is true that six shillings and sixpence and the clothes which I now wear are all that I possess in the world," I made answer.

"Not quite all," she said, "for you possess youth and strength and some other qualities. I am sure you are the man to do what I want doing. Do you feel inclined to play the part of a knight-errant, Mr. Hanmer?"

"I could wish that it might be played in the garments of today," I said. "This weather does not seem suitable to the wearing of mail-shirts and cuirasses."

"I am serious," said she. "It is a modern knight-errant that I want to find. But I am puzzling you—"

I sighed very gently, and looked at her in silence. She became dumb; her fingers played drum-taps on the slope of the desk. The entrance of the maid bearing

coffee relieved the strain of a situation which was attaining the pinnacle of absurd embarrassment. I forgot much of what had been said as the fragrance of the coffee and the aroma of a cigarette stole into my brain —after all, life was very pleasant. I prepared to fall away into a day dream; my hostess's voice, urgent and businesslike, brought me back to plain prose with a rapidity that startled me.

"—and now I'll tell you all about it," she was saying. "Let me see, where shall I begin?"—

"It is always safe to begin at the beginning," I remarked.

"Very good," she said; "so be it. You must know, Mr. Hanmer, that when I was sixteen years of age, my father, who until the time of his death last year was organist of St. Phineas the Confessor, in Soho, and a very well-known teacher of the piano, sent me to the Conservatoire at Leipsic, where I studied singing for some time. During my student days there I made the acquaintance of a young lady of high rank. Our acquaintance developed into friendship; the friendship after a time deepened into a warm affection: we became as passionately devoted to each other as if we had been sisters."

"There are sisters," I remarked, "who are not passionately devoted to each other."

"Then as devoted as sisters should be," she responded, calmly. "Well, to continue—we were in residence to-

gether at Leipsic for two years, and when we separated we kept up a regular correspondence. When I made my debut as 'Marguerite' she travelled many hundreds of miles to be present; once, when she was dangerously ill, I threw up an engagement in New York and hastened across the Atlantic to her bedside. You may judge, Mr. Hanmer, how fond we are of each other."

"I quite understand," I said. "And yet 'tis said that friendship is rare between women."

"It is all the deeper because of its rarity," she said. "But I must not dwell on that—I must hurry on to facts. The most pertinent fact, Mr. Hanmer, is this. My dearest friend is in sore trouble, and she has come to me for help. I am in trouble myself because of it, and I believe you can help me—"

I believe I made an impatient movement. A full sense of the utter incongruity of the whole situation had suddenly forced itself upon me. Here was this young prima donna, whose name was well-known in all the great musical centres of the world, who was rich and famous, and had doubtless crowds of admirers, every member of which would probably feel honored by obeying her least behest, turning to me, a mere stranger, a penniless man, on behalf of a friend whom she described as of high birth! I shook my head involuntarily.

"Miss St. Clair," I said, hurriedly, "You're doing me a great honor in giving me your confidence like this, and I appreciate it fully. But you remember what I told

you? I'm a broken reed altogether—it's a positive fact that this silver in my pocket is all I have in the world, and—"

She interrupted me with a sudden burst of silvery laughter.

"Oh," she said, "one would think I was asking you for your last sixpence. Do hear me out. I assure you that I am all that is genuine and honest—"

"And there's another thing," I said, for I was now bent on having my say, having already talked sufficient nonsense. "I feel, Miss St. Clair, that I'm an absolute cad for having permitted you to tell me so much. Upon my word, I ought to be kicked out,—I ought, indeed! Because you are kind enough to allow me to do you a trifling service, I presume upon your kindness so much as to let myself, a stranger—"

I had risen from my chair, and stood in act to go, for I thought this thing had gone far enough and I was not minded to let her commit herself further. She, too, had risen, and now stood at her desk, drawn to her full height, watching me very narrowly. Suddenly she lifted her hand.

"Stop!" she said. "Please remember that it has all been by my own wish that you are here, and that I have given you my confidence."

But she was not to persuade me. I felt I had let my love of the strange and the unusual carry me too far, and I was vexed with myself. I bowed to her, and moved

towards the door; my fingers closed on the latch.

"So you will not help me—because we are strangers?" she said.

I turned sharply.

"Miss St. Clair," I said, and then stopped, miserably uncertain. "You ought to know who I am, you know," I said.

She burst into another peal of laughter; a smile of merriment, not unmixed, I think, with something of tender recollection, brightened her face, and she suddenly rushed towards me holding out her hands.

"Are you sure I don't know you?" she said. "Oh, Cosmo, Cosmo, don't you know me—have you forgotten the old days in Dublin, and all the sweets and toys you used to carry in your big pockets for Nancy Flynn, when you came to tootle on the flute in Nancy's father's shabby little parlor. Cosmo!"

And at that all the mists of fifteen years rolled away, and I stood like a dumb man staring at Nancy Flynn, and wondering what had ailed me that I had not known her before.

CHAPTER III

I CONSENT TO BECOME KNIGHT-ERRANT

AS I stood there, holding Nancy Flynn's hands in mine, I lost all consciousness of my present surroundings and even of Nancy herself, and my mind went back for fifteen years and rebuilt the world in which I had then lived. I saw myself a callow subaltern in a line regiment quartered in Dublin, somewhat lonely, somewhat uncertain of my exact position in the world, and amongst its men and things somewhat restive and uneasy altogether. I recalled an insane desire which came upon me to learn the flute, and my first visit to Mr. Aloysius Flynn, who resided in a small street in the vicinity of the Castle, and exhibited in the window of his front parlor a card wherefrom the curious might learn that Mr. Flynn imparted instruction in the art of playing upon various musical instruments to the nobility and gentry. There were not many members of the noble or the gentle classes to be met at Mr. Flynn's, but you could always meet Nancy there. She was then a child of ten years—all legs and wings, and very gawky and boisterous, but able to endure the scrapings of amateur fiddlers and the tootlings of would-be flutists

with a patience that was marvellous in one so young. She and I had soon become friends—there was never a visit of mine to the shabby little parlor which did not result in some pledge of my affection being offered to Nancy, and in some proof of her love—usually in the shape of a very sticky kiss—being given to me. Sometimes, when Aloysius was enduring one of his many daily martyrdoms at the hands of young ladies who believed themselves born to shine at the keyboard or astonish with the bow, we used to slip out together into the streets and stare at the shops, and Nancy used to amuse me by her imitations of the brogue which sounded all around us, and I used to offer her some slight reward at the pastry-cook's or the toy-shop. As I have already said, she was then ten years old, and I was eighteen; and since then fifteen years had gone—quite gone.

I think we stood holding each other's hands for several minutes, and we looked very narrowly into each other's faces.

"It is you, Nancy," I said at last. "And somehow you are just what I thought you would be—a very beautiful woman. I am glad that you were only ten years old when I last saw you."

"I knew you very quickly," she said, still keeping her hands in mine. "You have still got your old tricks of manner. And you're not much altered. But I must be altered surely—when I think of myself as a child I think

of a creature all eyes and hair and arms and legs. Heavens! how ugly I must have been in those days."

"You were rather ugly," I said, laughing. "It's usually the case. But you were full of promise, Nancy. You're sure you are Nancy?"

She laughed, drew her hands away from mine, and went back to her desk. She took a key from her purse and unlocked a drawer. Her hand rummaged within it—she brought out a small parcel folded in tissue paper.

"There!" she said, holding it towards me with an air of triumph. "That's Nancy Flynn's passport to the realm of your belief in her. Open it."

I laid the parcel on the desk, and unrolled the paper wrappings. At last emerged a much battered doll, woebegone of countenance, and sore shorn of a wig that had once been flaxen. One eye had disappeared—the other stared at me with a fixity in which there seemed to be some sense of affectionate recognition. I placed my finger-tips on the scarred edges of a sadly-broken nose.

"Yes," I said. "I know you, Euphemia. I gave four and sixpence—about all I now possess, by-the-bye, for you in Sackville Street. You, too, like myself, have apparently fought with the wild beasts."

The doll's owner wrapped the doll up again with tender hands.

"I've kept Euphemia all these years," she said, keeping her eyes steadfastly on the paper wrappings. "And I'm

going to keep her. Sometimes—I take her out and talk to her. There—see how safely I put her back into my specially-locked drawer. And now—is my identity established?"

"I never doubted it," I said. "When you were a little girl, Nancy, I used to amuse myself sometimes by speculating on your probabilities, and long after I'd said good-bye to you, I often thought of you, and wondered what you were doing, and if you had grown into the—"

"You have said that already," she said. "Come—do you refuse to help me now that you know that I know all about you?"

She sat down, smiling at me just as she used to smile as a girl, when she was in one of her teasing moods, but I remained standing.

"You don't know all about me," I answered. "I have seen and done a good deal during the past fifteen years."

Her breath came hard: she looked at me narrowly.

"There is nothing like plain truth when one speaks to a friend," I said, and looked her squarely in the eyes. "Shall I tell you the truth, Nancy?"

She bowed her head; lifting it again, her eyes met mine fearlessly.

"Hear it, then—I was cashiered. Two causes, Nancy—drink, one—gambling, the other. That's three years ago. I'm cured of both—quite cured—but, then, I'm done."

I watched her narrowly. She too watched me with slowly brooding eyes. Suddenly her face brightened all over, and she sprang up laughing.

"Then it's all right!" she said. "Who cares for the past? Not Nancy Flynn, at any rate, with all her memories of the shabby little parlor and the little mean shifts to make ends meet. Cosmo! you're not done. Done! Why, there's everything to begin, and here's a ready-made romance lying in wait for you. Sit down, take another cigarette, and listen to me."

I obeyed her—if I could serve her I would, now that she knew everything. "I'll do anything I can, Nancy," I said. "Am I to call you Nancy or Miss St. Clair? And, by-the-by, won't you tell me how Miss Selma St. Clair has been evolved from Nancy Flynn?"

"Oh, another time!" she said, impatiently. "Don't you know that we have already wasted half-an-hour in chatter about ourselves—"

"Exchanging credentials, I think," I interrupted her.

"And that all the time the safety of my dear friend—"

"Ah, yes; the young lady of high degree."

She sat up and looked at me with a flash of the old anger which I remembered in the Nancy of fifteen years ago.

"Cosmo! Leave off that foolish habit of saying flippant things at serious times. How well I remember it in you! And this is serious," she said, imparting an addi-

tional wring to a cobwebby handkerchief which she had been twisting and untwisting for the best part of an hour. "Heavens! how serious—and all to fall on my shoulders."

I threw away my cigarette and stood up. I saw her watching me out of her eye-corners as I faced her in an attitude of strict attention, and a smile dimpled the corner of a mouth that had threatened to quiver.

"Now, then, Nancy," I said, "what is it? Tell me the whole thing in a plain fashion. I've never been able to do anything for myself, but I've a rare knack of helping other folk. Out with it."

"Won't you sit down?" she said.

"This is the attitude of strict attention," I replied. "Come, your story."

"Well, you know," she resumed, "it's like this—there may be all sorts of dreadful things in it—robbery, I'm certain, and perhaps murder, and I'm perplexed."

"It is perplexing," I replied. "You couldn't make it a little less so, could you?"

She gave me an indignant look. I folded my arms.

"I told you that I had formed a great attachment to a young lady of high rank, who was a fellow student of mine at the Conservatoire at Leipsic?" she went on. "Well, if I'm to tell you all, I must tell you who she is. She is the Princess of Amavia."

"Amavia—Amavia? Oh—ah—yes, I know," I said. "Amavia—that's one of the very smallest of the old

German states—an affair where the army consists of a field-marshal, six generals, seven sergeants, and twelve men, and the reigning sovereign can encompass his dominions 'twixt sunrise and sunset on his own legs, isn't it? The Princess of Amavia, eh?"

"The Princess Amirel of Amavia," she said. "And Amavia is not quite so insignificant—perhaps you'd like to consult an encyclopædia?"

"Amirel is a pretty name," I replied. "Yes. Your great friend of high degree is the Princess Amirel of Amavia, and I gather that—"

"The Princess is here," she said, interrupting me.

"Here! Where? In the house?"

"She is out at present. She is staying with me under the name of Miss Smith."

"There is nothing like variety," I remarked. "But the robbery which is certain, and the murder which is possible—what of them? Are they mixed up with the Princess's—that is to say with Miss Smith's—visit to you?"

"Oh, it's all mixed up!" she said. "Last night Amirel arrived here quite suddenly—without the least warning, you know—and threw herself upon my mercy. She had been obliged to leave the court of Amavia through the tyrannical conduct of her brother, the reigning sovereign, and she had come to me for advice and shelter."

"Shelter?"

"Well, shelter, protection, whatever you like to call

it. You see, it's this way—Amirel met a young Irish gentleman, Sir Desmond Adare, at Mentone last year, and he and she fell desperately in love with each other. Amirel has vainly endeavored to obtain her brother's consent to the marriage: he flatly refuses to hear of the *mésalliance*. Sir Desmond is out in South Africa with his regiment, and the Prince has taken advantage of his absence to force upon Amirel the attention of the Graf von Hofberg, who is at least thirty-five."

"I am thirty-three myself," I remarked.

"Oh, but—however, Amirel hates the Graf, and will have nothing to say to him. She has promised herself to Sir Desmond Adare, and I know her so well that I am as confident of her fidelity—"

"We will take the Princess's fidelity for granted. Proceed with the story of her adventures."

"Well, things became so distressing at the court of Amavia that Amirel could not remain there any longer. Her brother was continually pestering her to marry this Graf. Now, Amirel shrewdly believes that what the Graf really wants is not herself at all, but the amethyst."

"The amethyst! What amethyst?"

"Surely you have heard of the Amavia amethyst!" she exclaimed. "I thought every one knew of it—it's at least as famous as the Koh-i-noor, though it isn't a diamond. It's the most wonderful stone—with a weird history—which has been in possession of the reigning house of Amavia since the days of Rudolph the Black-

heart in the twelfth century, and it is always held by the eldest daughter of the house. For instance, Amirel holds it now; when she dies it will pass to the keeping of the eldest daughter of the then reigning Prince—"

"I understand. But I don't see what particular monetary value there can be in the amethyst that should make this Graf so covetous of its possession," I said.

"There is more than a monetary value; the legend of the amethyst is that it brings good fortune to its possessor, and, of course, what is a wife's is her husband's."

"I thought the opposite; but, of course, things may be different in Amavia. Well—so the Princess resents the craving of the Graf for her precious jewel!"

"Yes, and then she shrewdly suspects him of desiring to possess himself of her own jewels, apart from the famous heirloom. She has a magnificent collection of diamonds, rubies, and pearls—"

"I see—and so she has fled to you. What about the amethyst, and the diamonds, and the rubies, and the pearls?"

"Oh, they are here!"

"Here?"

"There!" she said, pointing to the door of a small safe, ingeniously built into the wall. "There!"

"There?" I said, gazing at the safe with consternation.

"Yes, there," she replied. "Would you like to see them?"

"Not for the world!" I exclaimed, backing away. "Not for ten worlds! You are quite sure they are there?"

"Quite sure. What a ridiculous question! The Princess placed them in the safe with her own hands."

"Let them stay in the safe until the Princess's own hands take them out," I said with emphasis. "I say, Nancy—I don't like this."

"No?"

"No! I begin to understand your somewhat vague allusions to robbery and murder. I think it quite probable that both will come within the regions of certainty if those jewels remain in that safe."

"But they can't remain in that safe! They'll have to come out to-night," she said. "They must come out—we can't leave them there."

"Will you explain?" I said, sitting down and lighting a cigarette. "I think I understand matters to this point:—The Princess has refused to marry the Graf von Hofberg, has defied her brother, collected her jewels and the famous or infamous amethyst, and fled to you, her intimate friend. The jewels are in that safe, and the Princess is out.—Go on."

"Well, as soon as Amirel arrived here we naturally talked the whole thing over, and the best thing we could decide upon was to send a cablegram straight off to Sir Desmond Adare, explaining her flight—"

"Plight would have been a more suitable word."

"Cosmo! I will not be interrupted by cynical re-

marks. I say we explained her flight and asked his advice. We sent off the cablegram at once, and just before noon to-day, we received a reply from him, instructing us to proceed immediately to his place in Ireland, there to await his coming. He added that he had obtained leave, and was sailing from Cape Town at once, and also that he had cabled instructions to his household to prepare for our reception and comfort."

"Oh—and are you going?"

"We are going by to-night's mail. What else can we do? Fancy the responsibilities of remaining here in London! The Princess is sure to be tracked; and the Prince of Amavia is one of those men who care little about legalities, while the Graf is worse. They might follow her here, and insist upon carrying her and the jewels off before my very eyes."

"I should say that is exceedingly probable. In fact, my dear Nancy, the whole story suggests some exceedingly disagreeable possibilities for you, and I regret them extremely. You see," I said, "it wouldn't be very pleasant for you, supposing anything happened to the Princess, to be found with all her jewels in your safe. Why don't you persuade her to take them to a bank and have them locked up?"

"She won't permit them to pass out of her possession," said Nancy with a sigh. "She's awfully superstitious about the amethyst—she must either wear it or have it within reach. No; that's no good."

"Well," I said, after a brief silence, "what do you wish me to do?"

She looked at me from behind the rampart of the desk with a smile that reminded me of the days when she used to climb on my knees and begin to rummage my pockets.

"Didn't I ask you to assume the rôle of knight-errant?" she said.

"I have neither horse nor squire, lance nor armor," I replied. "Come, what can I do, Nancy?"

"I want you to go over to Ireland with us, Mr. Hanmer," she answered gravely. "I want you to act as our bodyguard, travelling-courier, call it what you please, to protect us and stay with us until Sir Desmond Adare returns. It may seem strange, but I don't know another man in whom I would trust so much. I think you must have been sent this morning."

"But—I am penniless," I said.

"I shall insist on your accepting a proper fee from the Princess," she said. "Come, sir—do you accept the situation?"

I rose and bowed to her with every circumstance of formality.

"Madam," I said, "I accept the situation, and I trust to discharge its duties in a manner that will satisfy you."

CHAPTER IV

THE PRINCESS AMIREL

BEING now definitely committed to whatever adventures were in store for me and those into whose company I had so summarily been thrown through the whimsicalities of fate, it seemed well to make a start in good and sober earnest, and I accordingly drew up a chair to the side of Nancy's desk with the intention of settling our preliminaries at once.

"Let us get to work," I said. "If we are to start for Ireland to-night there are many things to be done. I daresay your Princess is not a business-like person, and quite unused to doing anything for herself, and so we shall have to do everything for her. It is now half-past four o'clock—if I am not mistaken, the Irish mail leaves Euston at a quarter to nine, so that we have really very little time. Tell me, Nancy, what arrangements you have made already, so that I may know exactly where we stand."

"The only arrangement made," she replied, "is that we are to cross to-night by the mail and journey to Sir Desmond's place to-morrow. My maid, who is to do duty for both Amirel and myself, is already packing our trunks—"

"Do not overburden yourselves in that way," I pleaded.

"And when that is done our preparations will be complete," she continued, with true feminine disregard of my pertinent remark. "Of course, now that we have arranged matters with you, you will take all the travelling arrangements out of our hands. You are to act, indeed, as courier and bodyguard, as handy-man generally."

"No," I said; "I am to act as director-in-chief. I shall expect explicit obedience to my orders. Now, please, answer some questions which I desire to put to you. First—how many persons will our party consist of?"

"Four: the Princess, myself, yourself, and my maid Moore."

"Ah! The maid; and is she a person to be trusted?"

"Trusted! She has been with me for five years—I'd trust her with my life."

"Ah, yes! But is she to be trusted with a secret? Lives are cheap—a secret usually fetches a fair market price."

"Cosmo! Your cynicism is detestable. Yes—yes—yes! At any rate I have trusted her with several."

"Very good. Next question— Who is going to take the personal charge of those confounded amethysts and things?"

"Well, seeing that they belong to Amirel, and that she has already brought them safely, all alone, half-

way across Europe, I should say that she will take charge of them herself," she answered.

"Also very good," said I, making a mental note of a stern resolution to see that the Princess kept up her reputation as a custodian of rare things. "Now, where is the money necessary for all this business?"

"I have a hundred pounds here in notes and gold," she said, unlocking the drawer in which the doll Euphemia reposed, and drawing forth a morocco case. "Will that be sufficient for our present expenses?"

"Amply sufficient. Hand it over to me. You and the Princess will doubtless carry some more money in your purses, and I possess six shillings and sixpence of my own, as you know, Nancy. Now listen," I went on, as I put the money carefully away in my breast pocket, "with the receipt of this money I assume command of the campaign. I propose to execute the commission with which you have entrusted me, which, as I take it, is to conduct yourself and your highborn friend to Sir Desmond Adare's baronial hall in Ireland, and to keep you, the Princess, and her precious jewels in safety there until Sir Desmond arrives. By-the-by, I suppose the Princess is of full age?"

"She is of my own age."

"Then she is twenty-five, and ought to know her own mind. Very good—now please give me a map of Ireland and this month's Bradshaw."

"How glad I am that I met you, Cosmo," she said, as

she rose to obey my commands. "Oh, a man bustles about and gets things done while women sit and chatter about them. Here's the atlas—will it do? And there is the Bradshaw."

"Thanks. And, by-the-by, Nancy—am I to address you as Miss St. Clair or as Nancy while we are engaged in this adventure? I confess that Miss St. Clair sounds strange to my ears, and Selma does not seem to accord with—"

"Oh, call me Nancy!" she exclaimed, impulsively. "Amirel calls me Nancy, of course, because I was only Nancy when she first knew me, and I shall tell her the strict truth as regards you—that you are a very old friend—"

"Tried by the separation of fifteen years, eh? Very good. Now for the map and the Bradshaw—the latter first, I think. Here we are: Euston 8.45; Holyhead 2.17; Dublin, Westland Row, 6 A. M. A miserable hour in which to arrive anywhere, Nancy, isn't it? Now then for the map—where is this castle wherein the Princess and her amethyst are to be secured?"

"It is called Annalleen Castle, and is a few miles from Ennis, but in which direction I don't know, she answered, opening the atlas, and turning to a map of Ireland. "There are so many castles just about there . . . ah, here it is!"

"Let me see, yes—Annalleen Castle. That seems to be about five miles south of Ennis. Very good—we must

travel by the Great Southern and Western, I think. Yes, here we are in the convenient Bradshaw—good; Nancy, we can breakfast on the train."

Nancy looked down at the map, the railway guide, and myself.

"Couldn't we—is it necessary to travel right through? —couldn't we spend just one day in Dublin?" she said. "I wanted to see the little street again—and perhaps we might induce whoever lives in the old house to let us sit down in the parlor just for a moment."

"I'm afraid this isn't a time for sentiment, Nancy," I replied. "But I don't see why we shouldn't stay in Dublin for a day and a night. It appears to me that we shall be secure there as anywhere—we can lock the jewels up in the safe of the hotel. Yes, we'll stay there and go on to Ennis next day. There, we may put Bradshaw and the atlas away for the present. We know our way to Dublin, and that is sufficient. I'll wire to the 'Shelbourne' for rooms. Ah, Nancy, I've never been in Dublin since—"

I believe I was verging on the sentimental and the reminiscent when the sudden opening of the door put an end to my eloquence. I saw Nancy's color heighten and her face smile a welcome as she glanced towards it, and some instinct told me that here was the high-born damsel on whose behalf two persons of low degree were taking so much trouble. I turned—the Princess Amirel of Amavia stood framed in the doorway.

It needed no second glance to know that one stood in the presence of a great lady. I have often wondered since that day what it was that I expected to see when the time of presentation to the Princess came. I think that I had somehow formed a notion that I should meet a species of semi-hoydenish young woman, intent upon having her own way in everything, and not too particular—after the manner of those born in the purple—as to the way in which it was gained. As to her appearance, I had formed no preconceived idea—most princesses whom I had seen were neither remarkable for beauty nor signs of intelligence, and it had never occurred to me that Nancy Flynn's royal friend would differ from them. And so it came upon me with something of a shock when I recognized that I had been enlisted in the service of a beautiful and gracious woman, whose goodness and nobility looked fearlessly out of her candid eyes, whose face was a reflection of all the great things in the world—I, a disgraced and ruined man, turned out of a shabby lodging that very morning because I had come to the edge of the abyss in whose depths rest the only grave for such as I then was! It seemed to me as I stood looking at her that I was as a renegade who has forfeited his right to wear the white flower of blameless knighthood, and is yet suddenly called upon to place lance in rest and take sword in hand once more in defence of a high cause. There is more than one man in the world who has thus felt at some

moment of his life, all through looking at a woman's face, and most of them will confess readily that when the feeling sprang up in their hearts something fell out of their lives and left them better men.

It seemed to me that I looked at Amirel of Amavia for a long time—in reality my glance swept her in one brief instant into the safe-keeping of my memory for ever. But how describe her, who is no more to be described than a rare flower or the transient gleam of sunlight on a purple moorland, or the full loveliness of a June day! It was neither in the grace and dignity of her bearing, in the charm of her manner, the kindliness of her eyes, the candor of her smile, the exquisite perfection of her beauty, that Amirel of Amavia's great claim to the worship of man lay, but in the subtle combination of each with the other. I can see her now as she stood there in the open doorway of Nancy's little study, her hand resting on the latch, her eyes glancing from Nancy to me, from me to Nancy, her lips slightly parted by a smile that had a suspicion of true feminine curiosity in it. She was of gracious figure, and taller than the average woman, and she held herself like a woman of royal birth; her dark hair, full of an indescribable sheen and shimmer, and in its greatest depths blue-black as that of a Roman matron, framed a countenance in which every feature was faultless, and of which the coloring was perfect. Her eyes were of the deepest blue, grave, frank, and candid, and as I learnt to know in the

days that came later, most beautiful when the soul that lay behind them was filled with love and tenderness.

I think I waited with a breathless impatience for her to speak, but I am sure I showed no sign of it. As a matter of strict fact not a second elapsed between her opening the door and addressing Nancy.

"Ah, pardon," she said, with a smile. "I did not know—"

She made as if she would go, but Nancy sprang forward.

"No, Amirel, stay. But how did you get in? I heard no ring."

"You forget that I borrowed a latch key—I let myself in." She smiled at Nancy's eager face, and half turned to me. "May I not know your friend?" she said.

"It is Mr. Hanmer, who gave me Euphemia, years ago," said Nancy. "Cosmo, make your best bow to the Princess Amirel of Amavia."

But she had stretched out her hand to me already, with a frank, hearty graciousness that was all in keeping with her presence. I would but have touched her fingers and bent low over them, but she pressed my hand with the grip of a healthy boy, and looked me in the eyes as she did it. And I pressed her hand too, and gave her look for look, and in that moment I swore to God that from henceforth I would live a new life or die in the effort to live it.

"Then Mr. Hanmer is quite an old friend," she said; "for if one may make acquaintance with a person by hearing much of him, Mr. Hanmer, I have already made yours. But—" she looked inquiringly at Nancy. "I thought you had lost Euphemia's grandpapa, as you used to call Mr. Hanmer, long since!"

"We have met again," said Nancy. "And—but sit down, Amirel—I have something to tell you. Dear, you trust me in everything, do you not?"

"Trust you, Nancy!"

"Then, dear, listen. I have told my old friend Cosmo" —she laid her hand on my arm as she spoke—"my old friend Cosmo, who was so good to my father and to me, long years ago, everything about our present difficulty —everything. He will help us. You do not mind, Amirel?"

The Princess turned from Nancy to me, and her eyes, grave and thoughtful, seemed to look me through and through. Suddenly she smiled, and once more held out her hand.

"I have not so many friends that I dare refuse to accept a new one," she said. "Thank you, Mr. Hanmer."

"I will serve you to the best of my power, Princess," I said. "I fear I can do no more than play the part of watch-dog, but I will play it faithfully."

She smiled again, and sat down, looking from me to Nancy.

"I conclude that you and Mr. Hanmer have been conspiring together," she said. "At what result have you arrived? May I know?"

Nancy explained everything to her. I stood by, wondering what manner of man Sir Desmond Adare must be to have won the heart of this beautiful woman. She listened attentively to all that Nancy said, understanding and comprehending every detail readily.

"Yes, that seems perfect in its arrangement," she said. "I thank you both so much. I think we have nothing to fear unless Adalbert and his friend the Graf should find us out and annoy us. Adalbert is so weak, and so easily led, and the Graf is so pertinacious, that if he discovers my whereabouts he will certainly persuade Adalbert to travel over to Ireland and lay siege to this castle, just as though we were living in the Middle Ages. They may, perhaps, bring the entire army corps of Amavia with them, and such artillery as the army is furnished with. Oh, it is most amusing! Yet I shall be glad when Desmond arrives, Nancy."

"If I may offer a suggestion, Princess," I said, "I would advise an appeal to the Foreign Office if—"

She interrupted me with a merry laugh.

"The Foreign Office! Oh, Mr. Hanmer, but would not that be equivalent to an attempt to make mountains out of molehills? I do not suppose the Foreign Office people have any official cognizance of Amavia—we have not even a consul in London. Amavia is a sort of toy

principality with a toy army and a toy government. We were great once, but our domains now are not equal to those of an English squire. Adalbert receives some ten thousand pounds a year from his liege, wherewith to keep up his state as Prince, and the palace is full of rats. I am afraid the Foreign Office would have little to say to a poor Princess of Amavia, Mr. Hanmer."

"But the jewels and the amethyst, Princess?" I said, meaningly.

"Ah, yes; the amethyst—that we must protect jealously," she said, a new emotion overspreading her face. "I will defend my amethyst and my jewels against all the world."

"I am particularly anxious about their safety," I said. "May I inquire as to how they are to be conveyed to Ireland?"

The Princess looked at Nancy.

"I brought them here in my dressing-case," she answered. "Would not that serve?"

"I should much prefer that they should be securely attached to the person of some member of the party," I said.

"Then that person must be mine," said the Princess with decision. "But—how is it to be done? I can't fasten a dressing-case about me."

Nancy touched the bell.

"Pattie will tell us," she said. "Pattie can suggest anything—she will know exactly what to do."

"Who is Pattie?" I inquired.

"My maid, of whom I have already told you—a perfect jewel, who can find a way out of every difficulty."

I drew aside into the embrasure of the window. As the maid was to form one of the party, I was anxious to find out for myself what she was like and how she impressed me. She entered the room presently, and I was glad to find that she was quite unlike the usual run of smart ladies' maids—instead of being frizzed and powdered and flounced and rustling, she was a thoroughly good type of the rosy-cheeked, clear-skinned, strong-limbed, healthy-looking English girl, neatly gowned and well groomed from top to toe, but without a suspicion of Frenchiness about her. It was easy to see that her dominant characteristics were common sense, shrewdness, and business ability, and I congratulated myself on the sight of her.

Nancy explained the difficulty in a few words—Pattie listened in attentive silence. When her mistress had finished she merely answered, "Yes, Ma'am," and withdrew from the room. Within a moment she returned bearing a species of satchel, which on examination I found to be a strongly-made affair of light brown leather, having a patent lock and a couple of stout straps, one of which fitted about the waist and the other round the shoulders. At the sight of it Nancy uttered an exclamation of delight.

"The very thing!" she said. "I had it made some years

ago for carrying valuables in, but I had quite forgotten its existence. You are a jewel, Pattie."

"Yes, Ma'am," said the girl. "Shall I fit it on, ma'am?"

"Fit it on me, Pattie," said the Princess. "I am glad it is not a bulky article, like a knapsack—the right side, please."

The satchel fitted very satisfactorily—it was certainly the very thing for the purpose for which it was intended. But a doubt suddenly rose in my mind.

"Is it large enough to hold the jewels?" I inquired.

"Ah!" said the Princess, "perhaps not. But that we can easily find out. Let us test its capacity. Nancy, will you unlock your safe?"

It was now that I saw the famous Amavia amethyst for the first time. Nancy unlocked the safe and produced a casket of some size, placing it on the desk and opening it with a key which the Princess handed to her. She took from it various small cases; the Princess suddenly turned to me with a smile which showed her a woman-like love of jewels.

"Would not you like to see these pretty things, Mr. Hanmer," she said. "Ah, no; I forget though, it is only women who love such toys. But at least you must see my amethyst—its history makes it remarkable."

I bowed my thanks and drew near to the desk. Nancy, something more than willing to execute the task, opened case after case, revealing a dazzling collection of precious stones, and finally the famous amethyst itself. In the

latter I saw nothing but a remarkably fine specimen of its particular species, but the splendor of the pearls, diamonds, and rubies aroused many anxious thoughts in my mind; and the responsibilities which I had incurred began to weigh more heavily upon me.

The satchel proved sufficiently capacious to accommodate the cases, and they were securely locked into it by the Princess herself. The satchel was placed in the safe, and Nancy, pocketing the key, turned to her maid and gave her some instructions about having everything in readiness for departure at eight o'clock. The girl listened attentively, bowed, and withdrew. The Princess's glance followed her to the door.

"What a healthy, wholesome-looking girl Pattie is!" she exclaimed. "One would expect to see her in a print gown and a linen sun-bonnet carrying a stool and a milk-pail."

"She is a rustic maiden, really," said Nancy. "And she has never lost her rustic looks. You can't think how clever she is though—she seems to do everything and to understand everything so readily. She—"

But I had just then no time to hear more of the virtues of Nancy's maid, and with an assurance that I would complete all arrangements and return to the flat at eight o'clock, I made my adieux and went away. The afternoon was drawing to a close, and I had several things to do before we set out on our journey.

As I crossed the little hall I perceived that Nancy's

paragon maid had already begun her preparations. She was superintending two other maids of less degree, who were carrying trunks and dressing-cases from a box-room; through the open door of a bedroom I saw sufficient to show me that the preliminaries of a great packing were strongly in evidence. I smiled involuntarily.

"Already at work?" I said.

The girl lifted her eyes and gave me a respectful inclination of the head.

"My mistress does not like to be hurried, sir," she replied.

I nodded and smiled again, and ran down the stairs. In the hall-way of the mansions a French poodle was sitting gazing at the passers-by, and a tall man, with a fierce moustache and a red nose, was attentively reading the board which exhibited the names of the tenants. He looked up as I ran down, and for a second I thought he was going to speak to me; then he turned to the board again, and I passed out and forgot him.

CHAPTER V

WE BEGIN OUR ADVENTURE

I WENT out into the sun-lighted streets with a whirl of conflicting thoughts and emotions making riot in my brain. The clock of the church on Paddington Green struck six: I looked up at the dial half expecting to find that it registered days and years as well as hours, and that I had either been thrown back or hurled forward in the march of time. It was not yet five hours since my adventure of Frascati's, and since then event had followed upon event with such rapidity that everything seemed unreal and unnatural. The thirty-three years of life which lay behind me had certainly never held a day so fully charged with surprises as this. In the morning I had gone without breakfast and searched my pockets in vain for a stray copper; I had been turned out of my lodgings by a long-suffering landlady, and had sold my last effects for a few shillings; in the recklessness of despair I had proposed to spend the greater part of my newly-acquired capital in luxurious eating and drinking. Well, if my landlady had not turned me out I should not have sold all that was left to me; if I had not realized seventeen shillings and sixpence I should

never have gone to Frascati's; if I had not gone to Frascati's I should not have met Nancy Flynn. And if I had not met Nancy—well, I should not have been engaged in an adventure, the end of which I could not and dared not attempt to foresee.

Nancy Flynn! How this meeting with her had brought back the atmosphere of the days that had seemed so far off, so utterly lost, the days when I was as callow as a chicken, as simple-hearted as a schoolboy, and as ignorant of the world as the veriest bumpkin! All the sights and sounds of the little shabby house had come back—Aloysius Flynn, in his threadbare coat, his perpetual polite smile, his kindly "Patience, patience, Rome was not built in a day—we shall improve, we shall improve greatly, Mr. Hanmer, if we are patient. Now let us once more attempt. 'Away with Melancholy' "—Nancy in her black dress and white pinafore, both always too short for her, nursing Euphemia, while Mr. Hanmer made excruciating sounds on the flute, or Aloysius himself played heavenly things on the old piano-forte; old Bridget, the cook, housekeeper and general domestic, with her greeting of "Shure yer honor carries God in yer face!"—all these things had come back with the graciousness of rain falling on a dry land. And Nancy was still the same, although she was now Miss Selma St. Clair, a prima donna of established renown, rich and famous and surrounded by luxury—and she had known me again, though I had not known her,

and she had kept Euphemia, poor, battered, broken-nosed Euphemia, all these years—perhaps for the sake of the hobbledehoy lad who had sometimes helped Aloysius with a little ready cash when the family exchequer was low, and had made a little sister of Nancy, because he himself was lonely and shy. Nancy Flynn! And besides these thoughts of my old friend, the little dark-eyed, gawky child who had grown into a beautiful woman, and had brought all the undoubted genius of her father to full flower in the perfection of her own voice, there crowded in upon me thoughts of the woman into whose service I had so strangely entered. I had begun this adventure in a somewhat cynical, mocking spirit—not even my affection for Nancy, never forgotten and now warmed again by the sight of her face and the sound of her voice, had been able to make me approach it in any other fashion. Being what I was, a ruined and disgraced man, what had I to do with folk of high degree, with their pleasures or their troubles, their joys or their woes? For the sake of old times—and especially after having made confession to her of my misdeeds—I would do what I could for Nancy, and through her for her friend, but in the latter's fortunes I felt no interest. This temper had clung to me until Amirel of Amavia appeared on the stage whereon Nancy and I were playing that bit of our life's drama, and then it had gone, and gone as if it had never been. For here was a woman, the mere sight of whom had roused all the best instincts

that lay within me—nay, had raised instincts and feelings which I had never thought myself capable of possessing—and it had all been done by one look at her face! I laughed angrily as I realized this, cursing myself for a sentimental fool. A pretty thing, I said to myself that I, who had plunged into all manner of vices and follies ere I had barely attained manhood, who had been obliged to exchange from one regiment to another because of my own ill-behaviour, who had had sorrowful expostulations and severe sermons from a long-suffering colonel, and had profited by neither, who had finally turned up drunk on parade, and soon afterwards learned, in common with the rest of the world, that His Majesty had no further need of my services, who had since steadily gone down hill with the saving grace that I had taught myself not to drink, and had given up gambling—probably because I had nothing left to gamble with—a pretty thing, I said, that I with a record like this should grow sentimental about anything, and especially about a woman! And yet so curiously are we constituted, we lumps of clay whom the potter thumps and twists or smoothes and pats lovingly, according to his moods, that I knew quite well that I was powerless to resist this new feeling—and I am not sure that I did not thank God that it had come.

But this, after all, was no time for sentiment, or for thought about one's self—it was a time for action. I stood in the Edgware Road for a moment, rapidly re-

volving matters—then I climbed an omnibus which was going towards Victoria, and rode on it as far as Stanhope Gate. There was a man living in Stanhope Street whom I wished to see—I had visited him three days previously in order to borrow five pounds from him, and had met with a curt refusal—I now proposed to visit him again on a somewhat similar errand. I walked into his rooms unannounced—he was evidently just going out to dine, and was very gay and brave in his finery, but his face clouded over at sight of me.

"Oh, I say!" he blurted out before I could speak. "I call this too bad, you know, Hanmer—too bad, upon my word. I told you the other day that I couldn't do anything for you, and I can't. I consider—"

I held up my hand—he became silent, and stood regarding me with a frown, mingled with something of wonder.

"Look, here," I said, "I've got a job, Prestwick—a big job." I drew forth Nancy's porte-monnaie, and emptied its contents into my hand. "You see that? There's a hundred pounds there. That's my employer's money." I put the case and its contents back in my pocket: with the other hand I produced my own capital. "You see that, too," I said, holding it in front of his nose, "that's mine—all I've got in the world—six shillings and fourpence—I've just expended twopence on a 'bus."

"Well?" he said, evidently puzzled. "What then? Glad you've got a job, though."

"We're pretty much of a size," I answered. "Lend me a tweed suit—an old one will do—half a dozen shirts, one or two other things, and a razor. These things I am standing up in are all I possess."

He looked at me for a second in something like amazement.

"With pleasure, old chap!" he said suddenly. "Here, come into my bedroom and take whatever you want," and he threw open a door and began to busy himself in pulling out drawers and opening cupboards. "You'll want a bag, or a light portmanteau," he said. "Take that—it's got the beastly newness just worn off it."

I packed the bag with the articles I really required, and we went back to the sitting-room. He looked at me curiously.

"It strikes me," he said, slowly and ruminatively, "that this—excuse me, old chap—looks like turning over a new leaf. Look here—will you let me lend you some money?"

"No thanks," I answered. "Six shillings will serve me for pocket money for some time."

"Well, have a drink," he said.

"No, thanks—not even a drink. Good-bye, Prestwick, and thank you. I hope your man puts saddles in the shirts?"

"Best man in London," he responded. "Well, good-bye, Hanmer, and good luck. I say—look me up when you're in town again, will you?"

Then he shook hands with me for the first time for three years, and I went away carrying the bag. But ere I had reached the street I turned back and re-climbed the stairs to Prestwick's rooms. He was just coming out of his door as I reached the landing.

"There's one thing more," I panted. "Lend me a revolver—one that I can depend upon. I can't afford to buy one, you know."

He turned back in silence, switched on the electric light, unlocked a drawer and pointed to several weapons reposing on a velvet bed within. I looked them over, selected a Smith and Wesson, loaded it carefully, and took a handful of superfluous cartridges, thanked him again, and went away fully provided for.

This episode had occupied an appreciable share of my precious time: I was obliged to begin my expenditure of Nancy's money by chartering a taxicab to Euston. I had to keep it there, too, while I made my arrangements, and the man had to drive hard to get me back to the flat by eight o'clock. But I got there to the minute, ready to begin my duties, and it was only as I ran up the steps that I remembered that although a long journey lay before me I had forgotten to get any food. But as I had been used to living on short rations for some time I did not allow this reflection to trouble me. The

thought uppermost in my mind was to get my party together and be off.

Nancy, or her paragon maid, or both had everything in readiness when I reached the flat, and the trunks were already being placed in a cab at the door of the mansions. Close by waited another; there was now nothing left but to depart. I found Nancy and the Princess attired for their journey and awaiting me in the study, and I immediately asked the question which was uppermost in my thoughts.

"Your jewels, Princess?"

She smiled reassuringly, and throwing open her light travelling cloak, revealed the leather satchel securely strapped about her waist and shoulders.

"Quite safe, Mr. Hanmer," she replied. "I'm afraid the satchel may prove rather an uncomfortable travelling companion, but one mustn't mind small troubles in cases of this sort."

We went downstairs—Nancy lingering on her threshold to give some parting orders to her small household, the members of which gazed upon our proceedings with much evident wonder. The Princess and I had reached the pavement outside when I suddenly noticed the absence of the maid Pattie.

"Where is your maid?" I inquired as Nancy joined. "She goes too, does she not?"

"Oh, yes; but she will join us at Euston. The poor girl has some relation living close at hand who is very

ill, and she begged permission to run away for an hour," said Nancy, unconcernedly. "We shall find her at the station."

There were no immediate signs of Pattie, however, when we arrived at the departure platform. I walked hastily along the train in search of her: when I rejoined Nancy and the Princess, she had just arrived and was explaining breathlessly that she had found it difficult to get a taxi, and had had to run part of the way. Recovering her breath, her customary cleverness exerted itself—she took charge of trunks and impedimenta, summoned a small army of porters to her aid, and marshalled Nancy and the Princess to the compartment which I indicated. It was plain that Pattie was accustomed to exercising the arts of generalship, and that she permitted no one to interfere with her own method of conducting an important movement.

I had made my arrangements for our railway journey with a view to keeping the Princess and her jewels under my own strict surveillance. Having ascertained that neither she nor Nancy desired to travel in the sleeping saloon, I reserved three places in a first-class compartment of a corridor carriage and one place in an adjoining second-class compartment. Next to that in which the three seats were reserved was a smoking-compartment—supposing I turned in there to smoke a cigar I should still be within easy touch of my charges, and Pattie was only a compartment or two away in their

rear. It seemed to me that this arrangement was eminently satisfactory.

We were in good time—it was still ten minutes from the advertised time of departure when the Princess and Nancy took their seats. I stood on the platform looking about me—for a wonder there were not many people travelling by the mail that night, and the scene was not so animated as it usually is. As I stared idly at the folk who came along, Nancy bent towards me from the open door.

"Cosmo!"

I looked up quickly: she was holding out to me something which I suddenly saw to be a massive silver cigar case. She bent still nearer.

"That was the last thing I gave my father," she said. "I wish you to have it—from him. Open it, and tell me if the cigars are good."

I put the case in my pocket unopened

"I will thank you afterwards, Nancy," I said. But I looked my thanks all the same. "That is like you. You perceive that with characteristic selfishness I took care that we were placed next to a smoking-compartment?"

Then I remembered that I had no matches, and with a word of excuse I hurried down the platform to get some. I had scarcely taken two steps when I was almost knocked over by an excited little individual who was carrying a square knapsack on his shoulders, a large

canvas under his arm, a Gladstone bag in one hand, and a huge umbrella in the other, and whose general appearance and attire suggested that species of Art which is cultivated by spectacled young gentlemen who wear long hair, velveteen coats, and enormous ties. He was loudly demanding a seat in a second-class carriage with his back to the engine, and as he kept continually dropping some of his property it required the exertions of several men to bestow him in a safe place. That safe place turned out to be the compartment in which I had already secured a seat for Pattie. I laughed as I wondered how that demure young lady would relish the presence of such a Bohemian looking travelling companion.

I had got my matches and was walking back when I suddenly caught sight of the man whom I had seen reading the names on the tenants' board in the hall of Nancy's flats. He was strolling slowly alongside the train and looking into every compartment with an apparently careless yet very noticing stare. I followed close behind him: he came to the compartment in which sat Nancy and the Princess, and I could have sworn that he half paused as he saw the latter. Then he passed on, looked into a few more compartments and turned back. We met face to face, and I saw from the sudden gleam in his eyes that our recognition of each other was mutual.

CHAPTER VI

THE IRISH NIGHT MAIL

AFTER his first glance at me the man walked slowly towards the rear of the train, still glancing into each compartment as he passed along. For a moment I thought of following him—then it struck me with sudden conviction that I was alarming myself without reason. It was a mere coincidence that I had seen this man twice within a few hours—he might have friends living in the residential mansions in which Nancy had her flat; nay, he might live there himself for aught I knew to the contrary. He might have come to the station to see a friend off: that he had no intention of travelling himself seemed to be evident from the careless, lounging fashion in which he strolled alongside the train, and from the absence of any sign of travelling impedimenta about him. After all, there was no more significance in my meeting with him in this way than there was in his meeting with me—he had just as much right to feel surprise and suspicion as I had. The thing, of course, was a mere coincidence, to be instantly dismissed as a trifle.

Some such thoughts as these formed themselves in my mind as I went back to the compartment in which

Nancy and the Princess awaited my return. I found them scanning the evening newspapers and exchanging occasional comments on what they read. For a moment I lingered on the platform. I looked along the train: the man had turned and was strolling slowly back in my direction, still staring, with apparent lack of interest, at the occupants of each carriage. Something prompted me to make a hurried excuse to my companions and to enter the next—the smoking-compartment. I let down the window and leaned out; just then the guard's whistle blew, and there was a final bustle all along the platform. I saw the man quicken his pace a little; a few strides brought him alongside the compartment in which the Princess sat—this time there was no doubt that he stared deliberately at her. As the train glided away from the platform the man turned his gaze upon me: his eyes were absolutely emotionless, his face expressed nothing. He stood watching the mail steam out; as the last carriage passed him I saw him turn on his heel and walk slowly away, lightly swinging his walking-stick as though whatever business had brought him there were of no importance whatever and had already been dismissed from his thoughts.

I went through the corridor into the next compartment, begged permission to absent myself for the purpose of smoking, borrowed the "Globe" from Nancy, and went back to the smoking-compartment to think this last incident out. I drew out Nancy's present, and

looked at the inscription on the shield: "To my dear father, from his little girl"—and found that Nancy had not forgotten to fill it with some uncommonly choice cigars. It was months since I had lighted a cigar—the first taste of tobacco braced me up like a strong tonic. I laid the "Globe" across my knees, leaned back against the luxurious cushions, and began to think.

Did the mere facts of having seen that man in the hall-way of the mansions at St. Mary's Terrace and then at Euston possess any particular importance? There were one or two circumstances which made me think they did. He did not look like an Englishman: if he had been pointed out to me and I had been asked to make a guess at his nationality I should have unhesitatingly declared him to be a German. Again—why was he reading the names on the tenants' board? If he lived in the mansions he would not have been doing that; if he were in the habit of visiting them constantly he would have gone straight to the people he wished to see. And why did he quicken his steps at the last moment and deliberately stare at the Princess? She was certainly beautiful enough to attract unwonted attention on the part of a lounger at a railway station, but there seemed to me to be something peculiar about the way in which the man looked at her—it was as though he were endeavoring to assure himself that he had really found some particular person for whom he had been searching. However, there was nothing to be made out of all this speculation—it

was a mere waste of time to think further about an incident which might possess no significance whatever. I accordingly dismissed it from my thoughts—though I confess that it kept recurring at intervals—and gave myself up to the newspaper and to my cigar. The train rushed on through the soft June twilight—we were already outside London; green fields and hedgerows white with hawthorn-blossom showed themselves for a brief while ere the night, heavy and purple, settled down for a few hours upon the sleeping land. I began to realize that I was tired, that the swift, steady motion of the train was making me feel sleepy. I did not want to sleep at that time—it was not within the scope of my arrangements to do so—and so I got up, shook myself, and went out into the corridor, to pace up and down for a time and to give an eye to my charges. In the next compartment Nancy and the Princess were apparently enjoying what women describe as a good talk. They sat side by side, with their heads close together, and they seemed to be talking very confidentially. Further along the corridor Pattie sat in one corner of the second class compartment, shielded from the little artist-man by the frail rampart of a magazine. The artist-man, however, was harmless as a child—he had fallen asleep, and lay back in his corner of the carriage apparently oblivious to everything around him.

We got down to Holyhead and on board the steamer without anything happening in the way of incident or

note. I had wired for a special cabin for the Princess and Nancy, and into this they were quickly bustled by the energetic Pattie, who appeared to be as fresh at the end of nearly six hours' travelling as at the beginning. I satisfied myself that they were comfortable and secure, and that our luggage was on board, and then I went down to the saloon for a cup of coffee. The coffee banished all thought of sleep from my head, and as it was already growing grey in the east when we steamed out of Holyhead harbor, I determined to spend the rest of the night on deck. It was a long time since I had smelt the sea, and the first scent of it brought back all sorts of memories and a desire to gaze on the waves as they came dancing away from the steamer's bow. It had gradually become hot and stuffy in the train—the sea air would cool and revive me.

On going on deck again I found that the majority of my fellow-passengers were more inclined to sleep than to watch the sunrise—most of them had retired to berths and bunks, and the deck was deserted save for the men busied with the baggage and the mails. But as I stood watching Holyhead mountain, itself a shapeless mass of grey, slip away behind us into the grey sky, the little artist-man who had nearly knocked me over at Euston came sidling in my direction. He passed and repassed me once or twice, then took up a position at the rail close by, and leaning his arms upon it stared at the rapidly receding lights of the harbor and the misty outline of

the land. I withdrew into the shelter of the smoking-saloon for a moment in order to light a cigar—the little artist-man followed me in and made great show of filling and lighting a huge meerschaum pipe. I looked him over in the glare of the electric light while he was thus occupied, and I thought I had rarely seen a more curious figure. He stood about five feet five inches in height; he wore a huge hat of the sombrero pattern, so spotlessly white as to have been presumably well pipe-clayed at a recent date; the rest of him was shrouded in a vast black cloak, and his feet were encased in buckskin shoes as dazzlingly white as his hat. His face, or as much as could be seen of it under the broad brim of his sombrero, was small and sallow; his mouth and chin were hidden by a rather thin and straggling moustache and beard; his eyes were screened by a pair of dark spectacles which rested upon a nose that turned up aggressively at the end. I felt sure that beneath his huge cloak he wore a velveteen jacket and a tie of mighty dimensions, and that his hair, the sombrero being removed, was parted down the centre and arranged fringe-like all round his head.

The little man lighted his pipe and puffed out great volumes of smoke. He threw away the match and blinked at me confidentially.

"A fine morning, sir," he remarked.

"The morning promises to be very fine," I replied.

"Ah!" he said, waving a hand eastward. "In about an

hour there will be a magnificent sunrise—a perfect dream of color."

"Oh!" I said. "Indeed!"

He nodded his head very vigorously and puffed more steadily at his pipe. I stepped out on deck and went over to the rail; turning my head a second later I found him puffing away at my elbow.

"The spectacle of the sunrise over the Welsh mountains," he remarked, nodding his head towards the coast we had just left, "is su-perb, su-perb!"

"I am quite sure you are right," I answered.

"U-um," he said, dreamily, "su-perb!"

It was evident that the little person desired to communicate with a kindred spirit, and I felt too good-natured just then to be hard upon him.

"You are fond of the beauties of Nature?" I said.

He turned his spectacles towards me with a look which was half surprise and half reproach.

"I am an artist," he said. "Nature is my life. These people"—he wagged his head with an air of contempt towards the saloons—"what do they care about sunrises or sunsets? I have seen some wonderful effects in crossing between Holyhead and Kingstown—seen them while other people were fast asleep or eating and drinking like hogs."

"Oh! You cross often?"

"When I have a picture of Irish scenery in hand," he replied. "The scenery of Ireland is su-perb, su-perb! I

am going to spend the rest of the summer in painting a wonderful scene. Do you know the river Fergus?"

"I am afraid I don't."

"Well, the Fergus is a river which runs into the Shannon. I know the scene on the Fergus which I have been wanting to paint for years—ten years, quite—but I have never had the chance of doing it until this summer. Now I am going to do it."

"I congratulate you," I said. "It must be very pleasant to feel that one is going to achieve an ambition."

He made no reply to this very commonplace observation, but continued to puff solemnly at his big pipe.

"Ah!" he said after a while. "It's a perfect dream, is that scene. A broad stretch of river—grey crags, and the ruins of a fine old castle—a background of purple hills far away in the distance—cattle knee-deep in luscious grass—a white-walled cottage or two—perhaps a peasant girl, with a scarlet shawl over her head, in the foreground—oh, it's su-perb, su-perb!"

"Must be awfully nice, I'm sure," I answered, politely. "I shall look forward to the pleasure of seeing it in the Royal Academy Exhibition next year. May I inquire if the title has yet been decided upon?"

He puffed out a great cloud of smoke, and then, with manifest relish, recited two or three lines of verse:

"Meadow and moor, the mountains, and the sky,
The whisper of the wind amongst the reeds,

The sunlight on the castle's crumbling walls,
And over everything a golden peace."

"Very pretty lines indeed," I responded. "They will appear, I suppose, on a neat label at the foot of the picture? Whose lines are they, by-the-by?"

"They are mine, sir," he responded. "I invariably compose a few lines to serve as title for my pictures. It is a habit for which there is a capital precedent, for it was indulged in, or let me say regularly practised by, the late Sir Walter Scott."

"Indeed," I said. "But—did he paint pictures?"

"No, sir; but he wrote novels. You will often perceive in reading the Waverley Novels that some of the chapters are headed by a few lines of blank verse subscribed 'Old Play.' Now, sir, that old play never existed save in Scott's imagination—the reader thinks that Scott dug the lines out of some medieval author because they just fitted the chapter, but as a matter of fact he manufactured them for a chapter. I manufacture my titles in the same way. Of course, they get shortened—the public taste inclines to something short. This picture of mine will almost certainly be called 'Golden Peace.'"

"I should call that a very good title," I said; "that is if it fits the scene you are about to paint."

"If you are ever near that scene," he said, "go and look at it. Come and see me painting it. I shall stay at Ennis while I am engaged upon it—you would find me

at the 'Queen's Hotel' there any evening, or any morning before nine o'clock."

Before I could thank him for this whole-hearted invitation he suddenly swung on his heel and went off, puffing great clouds of smoke about him. He climbed the ladder to the promenade deck, posted himself firmly against a rail, and appeared to relapse into a state of meditation. As he gazed steadily eastward I presumed that he was watching for the first signs of the rising sun.

I walked up and down the deck for a long time—the light grew stronger and stronger, and at last as I passed beneath the point where the sentimental artist had taken his stand he leaned over the railings and hailed me in a hushed voice, while he pointed eastward with a trembling finger.

"See! see!" he said. "The sun!"

As I stood watching the first speck of glowing scarlet rise out of the pearly-grey of the heavens I heard a step behind me, and turned to find myself face to face with the Princess. She smiled as she noticed my evident astonishment.

"It is much nicer here than in the narrow limits of one's berth," she said. "Have you been on deck long, Mr. Hanmer?"

"All the time, Princess," I replied. "It is some time since I had a breath of sea air, and I am trying to make up the deficiency."

"What a glorious sunrise!" she exclaimed. "What a shame that people should sleep through it all—no one seems to care that the morning is so beautiful."

"There is a man who cares very much," I said, pointing out the little artist. "Observe his rapt eyes and general air of adoration—he might be a sun-worshipper."

"Perhaps he is."

"He is certainly a curious little person," I replied; and I told her of my conversation with him. "We may possibly see him again," I concluded. "Sir Desmond Adare's castle is near Ennis, I believe?"

"Yes; it is on the banks of the Fergus," she answered. She was silent for a moment, and then she said; "Mr. Hanmer, I have a presentiment that we shall have trouble before Sir Desmond arrives; we may possibly have to withstand a siege of that castle."

"I trust there will be no trouble," I answered. "Do you really fear pursuit, Princes, or any attempt on the part of your friends—"

"Friends!" she said. "I think all the friends I have are on this boat—"

"Sir Desmond—" I interrupted.

"Ah, yes!" she said, with a sudden lighting of her face which made her ten times more beautiful. "Desmond! All will be right when he comes. But I have no friends in Amavia, Mr. Hanmer. I can't call Adalbert a friend, although he is my brother, for he has treated me unkindly in this matter. I was so friendless there,

indeed, that I dare not confide my secret to my own serving-woman. I had to flee like a thief."

"But what do you fear, Princess?"

"I am afraid—no, perhaps not afraid—I am uneasy about the Graf von Hofberg," she replied. "I cannot tell you, Mr. Hanmer, what an influence that man exerts upon my brother. Adalbert is impulsive, inexperienced, and very weak. He means well, but he does not know what is good; and the Graf, although his junior, is able to sway him as he will."

"What manner of man is this Graf von Hofberg, Princess?" I asked.

She shook her head, and it seemed to me that she shuddered slightly.

"He fills me with an instinctive horror," she replied in a low voice. "I cannot bear his presence. I am sure he is cruel and false, and he is certainly a gambler who has already wasted a handsome patrimony."

I started as though she had struck me smartly in the face. I must have shown some sign of my emotion, for she looked at me questioningly. A sudden resolution came to me. We were pacing the deck together. I stopped by the rail; she stopped too. There was no one near us.

"Princess," I said, "what has Nancy told you of the man in whom you are placing so much trust?"

She looked at me with eyes full of wonder.

"Of—do you mean yourself?" she asked.

"I mean myself, Princess."

"Oh!" she said, her face breaking into a delightful smile, "so many pleasant things. All about the days when you used to try to play the flute, and what hideous noises you made, and how kind you were—"

"Nancy has a fine taste for remembering all the nice things, Princess. Had she nothing else to tell you of me?"

"No—oh, yes; how pleased she had been to meet you again after having lost you for so many years—"

"Ah, yes, those years, Princess—she told you nothing of what had happened to me during those years?"

"No," she said, wonderingly. "No."

"May I tell you, Princess? I wish to tell you."

She looked at me still more wonderingly: her gaze was very steady and earnest.

"Yes," she said. "Tell me."

I told her everything—more, indeed, than I had told Nancy. I let her know what sort of man the man whom she was reposing her trust in had been, and I did not make any professions as to what he was going to be. I wanted her to understand that I hated to pose as a squire of dames when I was in sober truth a needy adventurer. And so I told her all.

She listened to me in silence, watching me steadily.

"Why have you told me all this?" she said, when I had finished.

"Because I have done with the old ways, Princess," I replied. "Win or lose, I have begun a fight against the old demons. I want to win—I will win. But I can't

fight under false colors. When you said what you did about Graf von Hofberg just now it cut me to the quick, because not so long ago I was as bad as that myself—probably much worse."

"What has brought about the change?" she asked.

I pretended not to hear the question. I went on speaking hurriedly:

"Now you know whom you are employing, Princess," I said. "I told you the truth when I said that I would serve you to the fullest extent of my powers. I—I think you can see just what I mean," I concluded, lamely enough. "I don't want to seem to be what I'm not, you know."

She looked at me very gravely for a second or two. Then she smiled in a fashion which I did not understand.

"I think I know exactly what you mean, Mr. Hanmer," she said, with some emphasis. "And I am glad that you have so much confidence in me."

"Confidence? Princess!"

"Ah-h!" she said, with an amused smile. "You are surprised. But the penitent shows his confidence in the confessor by—telling everything to the confessor, eh? There!" she continued, with a charming smile, as she held out her hand, "we are friends."

The rest of that happy morning floated by me in a mist of golden light. I made myself something more than agreeable to the little artist-man, and pressed upon him a cigar from Nancy's case. I watched the Irish coast

rise out of the sea with pretty much the same feelings which Columbus must have experienced when he sighted the new world. I laughed and chatted gaily with Nancy as we drove from Westland Row to the 'Shelbourne'; and promised to take her and the Princess to the little house where Nancy and I had first met. A cold bath and a hearty breakfast put me in still gayer spirits, but they suddenly received a startling damper when, on walking into the smoking-room of the hotel, I saw, lounging in an easy chair, the very man whom we had left on the platform at Euston at a quarter to nine the previous evening.

CHAPTER VII

THE ADVENTURE OF THE TELEGRAM FORM

I WAS so astounded at the sight of this man that I dropped into the nearest chair and sat there for quite a moment, staring at him as if he had been some curious thing which I had never seen before. Fortunately for me he had not raised his eyes when I entered the room, and I had time to look him well over, to assure myself positively of his identity, and to recover from the momentary shock which his presence had given me before he knew that I was there. He sat in an easy chair at a table in the centre of the apartment, he occasionally took a sip from a cup of coffee which, with an empty liqueur glass, stood convenient to his hand; on his knee lay an open letter to which he now and then gave his attention. It seemed to me that he looked rather tired and sleepy, and once or twice I fancied that his head drooped as though he were inclined to doze. At last he nodded violently; recovering himself with a start, he caught my eyes fixed upon him. He smiled a little, shook himself, drank off his coffee, rose from his chair with the slow, dragging movement of a

wearied man, and left the room; after his first glance in my direction he did not look at me again.

I got up from my chair and began walking about the room in a state of absolute astonishment. I had seen the man standing on the platform at Euston after the last carriage of the mail passed him—how, then, had he arrived in Dublin at this hour of the morning? One thing was certain—he had not left London by the Irish mail. Had he then chartered a special, caught us up at Holyhead and slipped on board the steamer unobserved by me? The thing was becoming mysterious—however one might theorize as to the law of coincidence, it was something more than strange to meet this particular man in Paddington in the afternoon, at Euston in the evening, and in Dublin early next morning. Under the peculiar circumstances in which I was placed the whole thing assumed proportions of an undeniable magnitude. In plain truth, the third appearance of the man made me uneasy.

A waiter came into the smoking-room—I beckoned him to where I stood in one of the windows.

"Can you tell me," I said, "if there is any way of reaching Dublin from London early in the morning except by the mail?"

"Oh, indeed there is, sir," he replied. "The night express arrives here at North Wall at half-past seven—there's two or three gentlemen come in by it just now—it was a trifle late this morning, sir."

"Ah!" I said. "Of course. Get me a Bradshaw, will you?"

I turned the Bradshaw over until I found the page I wanted, cursing myself for a stupid ass in not having remembered that there were two night services to Dublin from London. Yes, of course—there the thing was: Irish night express, Euston 10.15, Holyhead 3.30, Dublin, North Wall, 7.30. The man had travelled by the express instead of by the mail, and had evidently just driven down from North Wall when I encountered him. I flung the Bradshaw aside with a feeling that I had once more allayed the fever of suspicion which the appearance of this man had twice aroused within me. The fact of his having witnessed our departure from Euston now appeared to possess no significance. He might have been waiting for a friend there; he might have been waiting for luggage which did not arrive in time to enable him to catch the mail: he might . . . Oh, there were a hundred reasons why I need not bother my head about him any longer. The thought that he was watching our movements, that he was a spy upon the Princess was, of course, absurd—it was a mere coincidence that I had come across him once more at the 'Shelbourne.'

I lighted a cigar and prepared to go out into the unlit streets. I had not seen Dublin for nearly fifteen years, and there were certain spots I was anxious to visit. I felt almost free of anxiety just then, for I had taken

the precaution on our arrival at the hotel to have the Princess's precious satchel safely locked up in the manager's safe. The Princess and Nancy I was not to see till noon, when we were to lunch together. I therefore set out in good spirits, feeling, in spite of my new responsibility, that the world was a much better place than it had seemed to be twenty-four hours earlier. Happening to glance at a clock—there was no watch in my waistcoat pocket: it had long since been converted into cash—I noticed that it was just half-past ten o'clock. At that hour on the previous morning I had just walked away from my lodgings, to drag the potato sack up the Vauxhall Bridge Road and to begin this remarkable adventure. I could not help encouraging a few highly moral reflections on the mutability of life. Yesterday, in London at my wit's end; today, in Dublin entrusted with a delicate mission; yesterday, without ambition or hope; today, firmly resolved to redeem all the time I had mis-spent. Perhaps I was becoming sentimental; never mind, if it does a man good to be sentimental let him be as sentimental as he pleases—it is better to be foolishly happy than sensibly miserable.

Strolling here and there, up one street and down another, hanging over the bridges that span the Liffey, and trying to make up my mind whether that much-abused water-way is really as dirty as some evil-disposed folk would have one believe, I eventually drifted by the hour of noon into Sackville Street. There, near the Nel-

son monument, I caught sight of the little artist. He was standing with his back to the window of a tobacconist's shop; his arms were folded tightly across his breast; his eyes were fixed in a dreamy steadfastness on the moving panorama of the street. He still wore his pipe-clayed hat and his pipe-clayed shoes, but in deference to the undoubted warmth of the morning he had discarded his heavy cloak. I was rejoiced to find that my conjectures as to what lay beneath the cloak were quite correct—he now flaunted it in a black velveteen jacket, a pair of lavender trousers, and a flaming scarlet necktie, the latter overspreading a good deal of his chest. I walked close up to him before he saw me—he was still puffing at his great pipe, and still absorbed in contemplation.

"Well?" I said interrogatively. "So you have not yet departed for the scene of golden peace?"

He took his pipe out of his mouth, tapped me on the sleeve with its stem, and pointed across the street.

"Look there," he said. "Did you ever see such a glorious color in your life? It's su-perb—su-perb! Leighton's Phryne itself hadn't any such color as that."

I looked in the direction he indicated. On the steps of a small hotel a tall girl in a print frock was twirling a mop with vigorous movements of her muscular arms. Her head, destitute of cap, flamed like the rising sun; and all other blots of strong color in the street paled before it.

"A decidedly warm tone," I remarked.

"Ah!" he sighed. "If that woman were vested in a

sea-green gown, posed against a background of slightly rose-tinted marble and a sapphire sky, and held a spray of—let's think—yes, of white and golden lilies, oh, what a picture she would make! What a picture! Superb—superb! But I never could paint figures—it's beyond me, somehow. I'm like the Lord of Burleigh—

'He was but a landscape painter,'

—but I've a rare eye for color. That woman's hair is a dream: It's just the sort of hair Venus must have had—a real purply red. She ought to twist vine leaves in it."

"It's quite possible that she does—now and then," I said, wondering if he would understand the allusion.

He turned upon me rather sharply.

"Barley heads, more likely," he answered. "Or the labels of empty porter bottles. All the same, it's a superb bit of coloring."

"Does it tempt you from the landscape on the Fergus?" I inquired.

"No, sir; I'm off this evening by the corridor train from Kingsbridge. I shall sleep in Limerick to-night and go on to Ennis in the morning; to-morrow afternoon will find me settling down to work," he answered. "By-the-bye, I didn't give you my card—that's it."

Without another word he thrust a card into my hand, turned away, and went towards O'Connell Bridge at such a swift pace that he had disappeared amongst the crowd on the sidewalk before I had recovered from my

astonishment at his sudden departure. I glanced at the card, observed that it bore the legend *Mr. Paul Carburton,* and placed it carefully in my pocket.

"Mr. Paul Carburton appears to be an original," I said to myself. "If things prove dull at Annalleen he may be worth cultivating."

The thought of Annalleen reminded me that I must despatch a telegram to Sir Desmond Adare's household, warning them of our arrival on the morrow, and I crossed over to the General Post Office in order to despatch it. As I entered the telegraph department a man came hurrying out through the swinging doors and almost brushed against me. I looked up as I moved aside —it was the man whom I had already met three times within twenty-four hours, and of whom I had formed so many uneasy suspicions.

He muttered some hasty apology for nearly swinging the door in my face, and hurried off. I entered the telegraph office, found an empty desk, and took forms and pencil in hand. I was just going to write down the address when I suddenly caught sight of something which made me pause. The person who had last used that bundle of forms had exerted heavy pressure in writing: here and there the letters showed clearly on the form which I had been about to use. A familiar word met my eye; I bent down and examined the paper more closely. When I looked up again I was certain that my first suspicions about the man who had just gone out

were correct; there was no doubt whatever that we were being followed and kept under observation.

There was no portion of the telegram that I could make out in full—here and there the pencil appeared to have glided over it; here and there it had pressed heavily upon the paper. What I was able to make out ran as follows:—

. . . . . ndon
. . . . . ng des . . . . . .
. . . nc . . . amirel arr . . . . . .ngst
. . .s . . . .ing att . . . . . w . . . . . ns
. . . . . ng . helb . . . . . ng . . . ch
.n . . . . . m . . .s.

I removed this form from the rest of the bundle, folded it up, placed it in my pocket and left the telegraph office without sending my own telegram to Annalleen. That could wait—this thing seemed to me of paramount importance: a matter that must be attended to without delay. I hailed a car and was driven back to the 'Shelbourne' at top speed. Arrived there I made for my own room, locked myself in, and sat down to decipher the telegram form.

That was not a difficult task—it required little discernment or penetration to make the things out. The frequent occurrence of the letters 'ng' made matters all the easier, and within ten minutes I had written down on a scrap of paper my interpretation of the message

which had fallen into my hands in such a curious fashion. According to my reckoning it ran thus:—

> ..... London
> Lady answering description princess
> Amirel arrived Kingstown this morning
> attended two persons staying Shelbourne
> keeping watch on movements.

Here was proof positive that we had not only been tracked, but that we were even now under surveillance. What was to be done next? Feeling that three heads were better than one, I went off with the telegram form and my translation of it to the suite of rooms which I had engaged for the Princess and Nancy. They were just setting out to join me at luncheon: I took them back into the sitting-room, and with a few words of explanation told them of my adventure and discovery.

Nancy looked somewhat alarmed; the Princess appeared absolutely unconcerned.

"It is exactly what I expected, Mr. Hanmer," she remarked. "I have no doubt whatever that the Graf von Hofberg discovered my flight very soon after I left Amavia, and immediately set his agents to work. This man you speak of is doubtless following us and communicating his news to the Graf, who is probably in London by this time. Never, mind, my friends, Desmond will soon be here."

"But in the meantime, Princess? Had we not better reach Annalleen as quickly as possible—shall we not start out this afternoon?"

"Oh, not so soon!" she answered, pleadingly. "Nancy and I have set our hearts on sight seeing in Dublin today. And besides, Mr. Hanmer, the jewels are quite secure in the manager's safe, and no one can harm us—this is a free country, is it not?"

It seemed to me that it would have been wise to go south by the evening train, but I allowed them to set my scruples aside, and we arranged to continue our journey at an early hour next morning. This settled we lunched together, and spent the afternoon in a pilgrimage to the shabby little house in which Nancy and I had first met, and for the rest of the day we forgot that we were being watched and followed.

But going into the smoking-room of the hotel for a final cigar before retiring to bed that night I was reminded of everything by the presence of the man whom I now felt certain to be the spy. There was no one else in the room, and when I entered the creature had the effrontery to smile and nod in a way which seemed to me peculiarly offensive, considering everything.

"You and I appear to have some attraction for each other," he remarked jocularly, as I sat down near him. "I think we've met four times since yesterday at five o'clock—no, five times, counting this."

I bowed rather distantly—it did not seem to me to be part of my duties to interchange ideas or even converse in a perfunctory manner with a spy.

"I believe we have met before," I replied, in as distant tones as I could command.

"Yes," he said. "However, we shan't meet again after to-night. Confound it! I can't get to bed to-night—got to catch the White Star special express at North Wall at some outlandish hour—2.50 A. M., I think. And I can't sleep in a train—never could. I will make up for it when aboard the steamer at Queenstown."

"Ah—you are crossing the Atlantic?"

"Glad to say I am. I've been touring in Europe for twelve months and now I'm ready to go home. Yes, sir, Europe is very fine, very fine indeed; but I prefer America. There's something in America that you wouldn't get in Europe in a thousand years."

So the man was an American and a mere bird of passage on his way home? And I could have sworn he was a German—his countenance was so decidedly Teutonic. My suspicions about him began to fade.

"I meant crossing by the mail last night," he went on, being evidently inclined to be talkative, "but a friend of mine, who has a place in those flats I saw you coming out of, and who is returning with me to New York, missed it at Euston, and so we came by the express. Are those mail boats much better appointed than the express boats, now? Is there much difference in the time, any-

way? Seemed to me we were here almost as soon as you were."

It was evident that I had been on the wrong track, and it became more evident as the man went on talking. I sat smoking with him until midnight, and discovered or rather learnt that he was an American theatrical agent, and as innocent of the crimes which I had mentally alleged against him as an unborn child.

And so I went to bed asking myself over and over again the fateful question— Since this man didn't, who *did* send that confounded telegram?

CHAPTER VIII

ANNALLEEN CASTLE

I TOOK the precious satchel out of the manager's safe with my own hands next morning, and with my own eyes saw the Princess make it secure about her person. Since my discovery of the telegram form, and more especially since events had assured me that whoever was tracking us was doing so quite unobserved by us, I had felt particularly uneasy about the jewels, and had continually regretted that their owner had not deposited them in some safe place in London. As we breakfasted that morning I ventured to suggest to the Princess that this would have been a wise course, and that it was quite possible to leave them in absolute security in Dublin. I endeavored to point out to her that if the Graf von Hofberg were the unprincipled person she conceived him to be he might resort to desperate measures in order to secure so much treasure, and that a lonely house in a somewhat sparsely populated country was not quite the place in which one should keep such a famous jewel as the Amavia amethyst. But on this point the Princess was firm and even obstinate. She would not hear of parting from her jewels—as for the

amethyst, she said, it was against all the traditions of her house that she should permit it to pass out of her possession for a moment.

"Besides," she said, "what are we going to Annalleen Castle for if not for safety and protection? From Desmond's account of it, it is the sort of place one can defend if one finds it necessary to withstand a siege. If we are annoyed we will pull up the drawbridge, flood the moat—I know there is both moat and drawbridge there —and wait until relief reaches us."

"Ah, Princess!" I said, quite unable to restrain my feelings of amusement at this naïve way of regarding the eventualities awaiting us. "We are not living in Tudor days, nor even in the times of the Stuarts. I'm afraid the chains and hinges of the drawbridge are already rusty, and I doubt if we should get water into the moat —moats and drawbridges seem quite out of our ken nowadays."

"Then we must lock all the doors," she replied, with an emphasis which seemed to imply that that proceeding would settle the question. "At any rate, I am going to Annalleen Castle as a place of refuge until Sir Desmond Adare arrives, and over its threshold no one shall pass without my permission—not even Adalbert himself."

So there was no more to be said or done on that point —my duty now was to conduct my charges to the Castle in safety. That was a simple enough thing. We left

Kingsbridge by the morning express, and shortly before three o'clock in the afternoon found ourselves on the platform at Ennis; the journey had passed without incident of any sort. We had left the hotel very quietly; so far as I could see no one betrayed any particular interest in our departure; amongst all the people congregated on the platform at Kingsbridge I failed to notice anyone who seemed to be watching our movements; nothing occurred at either Limerick Junction or Limerick which aroused my suspicion or made me uneasy. And yet I was sure that every movement we made was noted, that we were being kept under strict surveillance, and that it was more than probable that the person who had sent the telegram from Dublin was actually travelling with us and tracking us to our destination. When we arrived at Ennis I made it in my way to scrutinize every person who left the train with us. The result yielded nothing—only five passengers got out besides ourselves: of these one was a young peasant woman; one a Catholic priest; the other three were farmers or drovers. There was nothing gained by an inspection of any of these—and yet I was sure that we were under observation. I glanced at the folk on the platform—there was the usual stalwart member of the Royal Irish Constabulary watching everything that went on with stolid, unemotional face; there was the station-master and his subordinates; there was the usual group of loung-

ers. I could not see any sign of the private detective or the professional spy; we were stared at, without doubt, but it was the stare of almost childish curiosity rather than of questioning inquisitiveness and espionage.

Whoever was in charge of Sir Desmond Adare's household at Annalleen Castle had made every preparation for our reception. An elderly footman, whose mutton-chop whiskers were white as freshly bleached linen and as stiff as fine wire, and who possessed a singularly humorous type of Hibernian countenance, met us on the platform and informed us, with many bows and other manifestations of politeness, that a motor awaited our pleasure and that another had been sent for the luggage. Outside the station we found a somewhat aged car which was driven by a chauffeur who was as ancient, as white-haired, and as cheery of countenance as the footman, and who, like the latter, was attired in a severely plain dark livery. Near our machine waited a small one, in charge of a smart man, and all about the two cars lingered a mob of barefooted urchins, waiting, open-mouthed, to watch the quality depart.

Leaving Pattie, who was still as fresh as paint and as full of energy as ever, to follow with the luggage, we entered our machine and were driven off at a smart rate. After our long journey in the train it was highly refreshing to feel the fresh breeze and the warm sunlight; and if we had been engaged on any other busi-

ness I should have felt myself boyishly happy at the prospect of spending a few weeks amongst such delightful surroundings. I had never been in this corner of Ireland before, and I was glad to find that although it possessed no very marked features of its own, its situation was full of quiet beauty. In the distance hovered the faint purple lines of hills and mountains; here and there rose the ruins of some ancient house of religion or stronghold of the old Irish chieftains; the woods and meadows were brilliantly green in the strong June sunlight; the little, white-walled cottages made spots of glaring light amidst the prevailing tints of blue and emerald. Overhead hung a cloudless sky; in the narrow lanes through which we passed the scent of hawthorn still remained in the clear air; in the little hamlets the faint odor of burning peat came to us with the fragrance of incense. Everything was delightful and full of charm; it was difficult to realize that London with all its whirl and bustle lay only a few hours' journey away.

We gained our first glimpse of Annalleen Castle as we swept down a long, gradually shelving drive which traversed the park, and was shaded for at least half-a-mile by a magnificent avenue of limes. Sir Desmond Adare's ancestral home, seen from this point, presented a striking appearance. It stood, a four-square pile of grey stone, embattled and towered at the angles, on the summit of a slight eminence, on the slopes of which

ancient oaks and ashes made a fringe of greenness to the walls which rose above their topmost branches. It was in our full view for some time ere we approached closely to it. The Princess, having once caught sight of it, remained gazing at it intently and in silence. Her silence communicated itself to her companions—I, for my part, was thinking what a perfect stronghold it must have been in the old days; Nancy regarded it dreamily, as if struck by its romantic appearance. We finally drew near it by a long, winding ascent; at last we passed over a drawbridge and under a fine old gateway into a spacious courtyard. As the machine drew up and the Princess descended a flag fluttered out from the staff on the principal tower.

There were numerous domestics gathered at the door; from their midst advanced a motherly looking woman in a rustling silk gown, upon whose general appearance old and trusted family servant was writ large, and a solemn-faced butler in whom I instantly recognized the old soldier. Both bowed low: both laid their duty and that of their fellow servants at the Princess's feet. Had the master of the house himself been present we could not have been more impressively received. We entered the old stone hall with feelings of relief: here, at any rate, was a comfortable place in which to withstand our enemies if they should descend upon us.

"I have a feeling that this is—home," said the Prin-

cess, as she sat down in one of the wide window places. "Oh, if only Desmond had been here to welcome us, Nancy! Then it would have been perfect."

"Princess," I said, approaching her, "there is one thing I beg of you to do without delay. There is doubtless a strong room in the Castle—will you deposit your jewels in it at once?"

"Ah, but I may want some of them," she said smiling.

"Is that necessary?" I answered, smiling in my turn. "Can you not dispense with them until Sir Desmond arrives?"

"We shall all feel so much safer if they are in a safe place," said Nancy, taking my cue.

"Then, of course," said the Princess. "Will you find out where the strong room is, please, Mr. Hanmer."

The butler and the housekeeper were at the door, where the light car with Pattie and the luggage had just arrived. I went over to the former: my suspicion that he was an old soldier was confirmed by the way in which he pulled himself up to attention as soon as I addressed him.

"There is, I suppose, a strong room in the Castle?" I inquired.

"Oh, indeed, there is, sir," he replied.

"The Princess desires to deposit some valuables in it," I said.

"Certainly, sir—I have the key," he answered.

Leaving Nancy to examine the old armour which

decorated the stone walls, the Princess and I followed the butler down a long corridor that seemed to lead into the heart of the Castle. He ushered us at last into what was obviously the butler's pantry, and pointed out a door in one corner.

"That is the door of the strong room, sir," he said. "You will notice that it opens out of my pantry, and that all the windows of the latter are strongly barred. There is a great quantity of gold and silver plate in the strong room, sir; and the family jewels are deposited there at the present time. I sleep here always, sir— Her Highness's valuables will therefore be perfectly safe."

"What a responsibility for anyone!" exclaimed the Princess. "Are you not afraid to sleep here in such close proximity to so much valuable property?"

The man smiled in a respectful, deprecatory fashion.

"No, ma'am," he replied; "there are strong locks and bolts to my door, and more than that we have a bull-dog who sleeps in the little lobby there every night. I pity any burglar, ma'am, who endeavored to get past him—my master is the only person beside myself who dares approach him."

"Ah!" said the Princess with evident interest. "You will show him to me? I wonder if he will allow me to approach him?"

"I think you had better defer that experiment until Sir Desmond's arrival, Princess," I said laughingly.

The butler opened the door of the strong room and

we entered. It was an apartment of about twelve feet square, without natural light, and the Princess protested against its stuffiness.

"Here is a small safe, sir," said the butler, "in which Her Highness might deposit her valuables, and of which she could take the key. It is at present empty—the late Lady Adare, Sir Desmond's mother, used to keep her jewels in it."

This proposal seemed to interest and satisfy the Princess. She took off the satchel, and at my request ascertained that the patent lock was in order. The butler opened the safe, and the Princess placed the satchel within it with her own hands, and under the butler's guidance locked it and took possession of the key. I confess that I viewed these proceedings with great satisfaction. The Amavia amethyst and the Princess's jewels were now established in a security which seemed to me inviolable.

I took the Princess back to Nancy, and then returned to the butler's pantry. He was sorting out some silver when I entered, but he immediately relinquished his task and stood to attention.

"I wanted to have a word with you," I said. "By the way, I don't know your name yet."

"My name is Deasy, sir—Edward Deasy."

"Thank you. Well, Deasy—you are doubtless in your master's confidence?"

"I have served the family for twenty years, sir," he answered, quietly.

"You are aware, no doubt, of the circumstances which have brought the Princess Amirel of Amavia here?" I I said.

"Yes, sir. I received a lengthy cablegram from my master two days ago, and in addition to that Sir Desmond told me a great deal before he sailed for South Africa," he replied.

"That is well," I said, with a sigh of relief. "You know that it is quite probable that we may have some molestation from the Princess's relations and friends? Can we guard her in safety until Sir Desmond arrives?"

"Yes, sir," he replied, calmly; "both the Princess and the amethyst, sir. I know—or I guess—what is in that satchel"—he nodded his head toward the door of the strong room—"and it is as safe in there as if it were in the Bank of England. Make yourself easy, sir."

CHAPTER IX

WE EXAMINE OUR SURROUNDINGS

I RETURNED to the stone hall to find the Princess and Nancy gathered about a tea-table which had been laid in a great window-place that overlooked the park and the river winding away in the distance like a streak of silver. Both were in high spirits—no one would have guessed from their light-hearted chatter and laughter that they had sought Annalleen Castle as a place of refuge. There were more like schoolgirls home for a holiday than refugees, and their evident pleasure in their new surroundings, and the consciousness that we were now in a situation of comparative security aided me in throwing off a good deal of the feeling of responsibility which had oppressed me ever since I had taken this adventure in hand.

The Princess was eager as a child to see the Castle, and when we had finished tea nothing would satisfy her but an immediate tour of inspection. She desired to see everything, and insisted that I should at once procure all the keys and conduct Nancy and herself all over the place. I was obliged to seek the assistance of

Deasy, and to explain that we should require a guide. He was still engaged in polishing his silver, but he put his work aside and intimated that he would act as cicerone himself. He took a large bunch of keys from a drawer and returned with me to the hall, where the Princess was awaiting our coming with evident impatience.

"It may give you a better idea of the Castle, sir," said Deasy, "if we first step out into the courtyard. You will perceive"—his voice dropped easily into the cadence of the professional guide—"that the Castle is a four square building, ranging round an inner court, with towers at each angle, and a portcullised gateway on the east side. For purposes of defense it was one of the strongest fortresses in the country, sir."

"So I should imagine," I replied. "By-the-bye, is there any way of obtaining entrance to the Castle except through the gateway there?"

"No, sir; none whatever. Whoever desires entrance to Annalleen Castle must cross the moat and pass the gateway. Every entrance is from the courtyard."

"So that one might easily withstand a siege," said the Princess.

"Providing no heavy guns were brought to bear upon us," I said, smiling. "I'm afraid that even these walls would crumble before modern artillery, Princess."

"If you will follow me to the top of the south

tower, sir," said Deasy, "you will be able to command a view of the entire ground plan of the Castle. It is not a fatiguing ascent."

We followed him to a postern in the wall of the tower. He unlocked the door and revealed a winding flight of stairs, well-lighted and cleanly swept. Nancy remarked on this spick-and-span appearance as contrasted with the usual gloominess and dinginess of most similar places.

"Yes, ma'am," said Deasy. "We keep this stairway in order for two reasons. When Sir Desmond is at home he is very fond of sitting on the battlements at the top. There is a very fine view from the top of the tower, ma'am, and Sir Desmond usually smokes a cigar there every evening after dinner. Another reason is that visitors to the Castle—we admit them on two days in each week—always seek permission to go up the tower. It is a visitor's day to-morrow, and it is not often that some one does not come."

Arrived at the top of the tower the Princess, Nancy, and myself looked on the scenes at our feet and all around us with quite different feelings. The Princess sat down on the broad ledge which ran all round the tower beneath the battlements, and appeared immediately to lose herself in thought. Nancy, with various exclamations of delight and pleasure, studied the surrounding landscape from every possible standpoint. As for me, I

leaned over the battlements and examined the ground plan of the whole place. There was no questioning its natural advantages of situation—in medieval days it must have been impregnable. As I have already said, it stood on the summit of a rocky mound, and from the base of its walls the ground fell away at a sharp angle. At the foot of the mound, and almost hidden by the trees which grew thickly on the sides, was a wide moat which had evidently been formed by diverting a stream from its original course. This was crossed by a drawbridge lying beneath an ancient stone gateway, from which the motor road ascended by a gradual spiral that passed completely round the Castle ere it reached the entrance. As the moat was quite twenty feet in width it seemed impossible for anyone to reach the Castle if the drawbridge happened to be up.

"It is indeed a place of great natural strength," I remarked to Deasy, who stood silently awaiting our pleasure.

"Yes, sir," he replied, stepping forward to the parapet. "It has baffled more than one chieftain and his men in the old days. You now perceive the plan of the Castle, sir. On the south side are the family apartments, and the new great hall, built by Sir Desmond's grandfather; on the east are the kitchen and offices; the stables and garage fill all the north side; the most ancient part of the Castle, including the old great hall and gallery,

is on the west side. There are a great deal of old furniture and many curiosities, sir, in that part of the Castle; but it has not been open except to visitors for many years. The great hall and the gallery above it are said to be haunted."

"Please tell me about that," said Nancy. "Is it a real ghost?"

"I cannot say as to that, ma'am," answered Deasy. "The folk hereabout believe in it, but I have never heard or seen anything, although I often walk through the old hall very late at night."

"And the legend?" said the Princess, who had drawn near to listen.

"It is a very ancient one, ma'am. It would seem that in the days of long ago there was a king lived in this Castle, and when he died he left it to the eldest of his twin sons, and bade the younger build a castle for himself on the other bank of the Fergus. The two sons quarrelled as to where the castle should be built, and the younger finally built it on that mound which you may see across the river, ma'am—there is a small matter of ruins still on the crown of it—so that he could overlook Annalleen. The elder brother was very angry at this, but he concealed his wrath until the new castle was finished, and then he sent messengers to his brother, saying that it was the wish of his heart that peace should now be made between them, and bidding him to a great feast in the hall here below us. It is said

that when the feast was over the younger brother's attendants were treacherously slain, and that he himself had his eyes put out, after which he was turned out of the Castle with the remark that he had looked his last on Annalleen. He wandered about in the parks and woods until he fell dead from exhaustion; and it is said that his ghost is sometimes seen in the old hall and gallery, looking for the lost eyes. There is a saying that it only appears when one of the Adares is about to suffer a violent death, but as there have been no such deaths in the family for three hundred years I cannot say if there is any truth in the saying."

Having amused us with this blood-curdling instance of fraternal feeling, Deasy took us to the foot of the tower again and proceeded to conduct us through the south and west wings of the Castle. The apartments reserved for the family were large and full of interest, but to my mind the most attractive part of the castle was the ancient hall. It was long, high, and rather narrow —a massive roof of black oak canopied it, and its walls were panelled with oak for half their height. A great, open fireplace almost filled one end—at the other a massive oak staircase led to a gallery which ran round three sides of the hall. The table still stood in the centre of the hall—a long, narrow table of unstained oak, almost white with the polishings of centuries—and about halfway down its length was the lord's chair of state. There were several ancient pictures on the walls, and tapestry

hangings in the gallery, and the whole place was redolent of antiquity.

My admiration for this fine old apartment was fully shared by the Princess.

"I should love to see this hall restored," she said, looking about her with critical eyes. "How beautiful it would be with a profusion of lights—torches and great candles, and a huge fire in that mighty fireplace, and musicians playing in the gallery!"

"It was a favorite project of the late Lady Adare, the restoration of this hall, ma'am," said Deasy. "She has often talked to me about what she would like to do with it."

"Ah, you must tell me about that!" said the Princess, eagerly. "I like this old place much better than the new hall."

"It is much more picturesque, but may not be quite so comfortable," remarked Nancy. "I don't think I should like to dine here late in the evening—I should be so afraid of the poor man coming to find his eyes. And look at the shadows in the gallery, how suggestive they are of everything that is weird and mysterious? I dare not stay in this place alone."

Deasy listened to all these remarks with a smile of respectful indulgence. After he had shown us all there was to see in the west wing he conducted us into the courtyard again, and crossed over to a dog-kennel

which stood near the north tower. He turned to the Princess as we drew near it.

"This is the bull-dog of which I told you, ma'am," he said. "He is asleep at present, but he will wake and come out of his kennel. Be kind enough to keep out of range of his chain, if you please, sir—he is of an exceptionally fierce temper, and always uncertain."

We kept a respectful distance from the kennel, through the open doorway of which we saw a brindled mass lying curled up in the straw. Deasy went close up and gave a shrill whistle. The curled up mass moved and twisted—in another second the bull-dog put his head out of the door and looked at us.

He was certainly the ugliest dog I have ever seen, but there was an expression of intelligence in his face that made you forget his ugliness as soon as he looked at you. He glanced at the three strange faces with a sort of critical observation, in which there was the same sort of interest that a policeman would show in looking over a group of suspects. When he saw Deasy a gleam of friendly recognition came into his eyes, and he emerged slowly and with some dignity from his shelter. He stood blinking in the sunlight, and there was something in his attitude which made me think that he knew he was being looked at.

"What is his name?" inquired Nancy.

"His name is Peter, ma'am," answered Deasy. "He

was bred by a great dog-fancier—a man of the name of Peter Riordan—of these parts. He is pure bred and very valuable—Sir Desmond gave great money for him when he was little."

"And he will make friends with no one but Sir Desmond and yourself?" asked the Princess. "Would he not make friends with me?"

"It is the way he has been trained, ma'am," said Deasy, cleverly evading the main question. "He knows that Sir Desmond is his master, and that it is his duty to help me in guarding the strong room, and he never meddles with anything outside of his duty. Lie down again, Peter—he never sleeps during the night," continued Deasy as we turned away, "or if he does, 'tis with one eye and both ears open."

The dog blinked his eyes and went back into his kennel. The Princess addressed some term of endearment to him. He lifted his head, looked steadily at her, and then curled himself up in his straw. It was plain to see that Peter was beyond blandishments and cajolery of any kind.

After we had dined that evening I left the Princess and Nancy and went off for a long walk in the park. Following the course of the stream, whose waters served to fill the moat, I came after half-an-hour's walking to the point of its junction with the river. It was then a little after sunset, and the after-glow of the sun was flooding everything with a purple radiance. As I stood

by the edge of the water wondering at the beauty of the scene, a familiar voice broke in upon my reverie.

"Ah, now, if only anybody could paint that! Superb! But it never lasts long, and it's changing with every second. Quite hopeless to try it."

I turned round to find Mr. Paul Carburton standing close by. He had evidently not recognized me, for he stared and started.

"Hullo!" he said. "You, eh? You've found your way down here, then? I didn't see who it was."

I nodded and smiled—smiled because the little man looked more ridiculous than ever. He had an artist's satchel and easel and a camp stool slung over his shoulders. He carried a canvas in one hand and his huge umbrella in the other. He still wore the white sombrero and the white shoes, but he had discarded his velveteen coat in favor of a species of holland blouse which was plentifully adorned with dabs of paint. His spectacled eyes fixed themselves upon me with innocent interest.

"Staying near here?" he asked, with candid curiosity.

"I am staying at the Castle," I answered, pointing to the grey pile rising above its fringe of trees across the park.

"Oh—at Annalleen. That's the haunted place, isn't it? I've often thought of looking it over when I've chanced to be in these parts—they admit visitors now and then."

"It is visitors' day to-morrow," I remarked.

"Is it? Well, perhaps I shall look in—perhaps I shan't. I'm sketching in my picture—the scene's about a mile down the river from here—and if I get very much interested in it I shall work at it until sunset to-morrow. I've been at it all this afternoon. I'm on my way to Ennis now."

"Rather a long walk, isn't it? Carrying all those things, too."

"Oh, it does you good after sitting on a campstool all day," he replied. "I say, the Castle looks very fine from here—su-perb, in fact. I'm half inclined to make a picture of it before I go away."

Then, with the same abruptness with which he had left me in Sackville Street the previous morning, the little man went off, striding rapidly along a path which followed the edge of the river. When he had put at least two hundred yards between us he turned and called "Good-night!" very loudly; then he disappeared amongst the darkness of a thick coppice, and I saw no more of him for that time.

I strolled slowly back to the Castle with a mellow twilight softening everything around me. As I entered the courtyard lights gleamed out in the windows of the great drawing-room, and the notes of a piano suddenly broke the silence of the evening. A moment later I was listening spell-bound to the voice of Nancy Flynn.

CHAPTER X

THE UNWELCOME PAST

THE next few days passed away quietly and uneventfully. On the morning following our arrival at the Castle the Princess received a cablegram from Sir Desmond Adare in which he informed her that he was just leaving Cape Town by the "Dunnottar Castle" and hoped to join her within three weeks. She and Nancy were naturally overjoyed at this news; it appeared to me, however, that a good deal might happen before Sir Desmond arrived to take up his rightful responsibilities. Now that we were fairly settled at Annalleen my anxiety about various matters had returned upon me in full force. I began to grow moody and taciturn, and it was not long before Nancy noticed it.

"What is it, Cosmo?" she asked, as she and I found ourselves alone one morning. "You seem troubled about something. May I not know what it is?"

I looked at her and saw that she was anxious on my behalf, and I judged it best to tell her all that was in my mind.

"I confess that I am bothered, Nancy," I replied. "I'm anxious about—oh, well, everything."

"But nothing has happened," she exclaimed. "We have been here three days now, and have had no molestation, nor even the suspicion of it."

"I don't argue much from that," I said. "How do we know that our enemies—whoever they may be—are not perfecting some scheme? You see, Nancy, there is no forgetting the fact that news of the Princess's whereabouts was wired from some person in Dublin to some person in London, and I have little doubt that whoever tracked us to Dublin has tracked us to this place. In that case, what is sure to happen? The people who have tracked us have done so with some purpose."

"Oh!" she said, interrupting me, almost impatiently. "I don't think there is much doubt about who it is that has tracked us or about his purpose. It is the Graf von Hofberg, of course; and we all know what his purpose is."

"I wish he would appear then," I said. "I like to see the people I am fighting. If it really is he and his friend, the Prince of Amavia, who are following us, I wish they would make their entry upon the stage and let us all get to work."

"That's a poor simile, Cosmo!" she said, laughingly. "If they do appear it will not be acting we shall be—there'll be wigs on the green. I know Fritz von Hof-

berg—he is a desperado—just the sort of man who ought to have lived in the Middle Ages and carried a two-handed sword."

"I feel in the humor for him," said I. "I shall doubtless form a great respect for him if he should appear on the scene. It is this waiting I don't like, Nancy! I believe I should have jumped for joy if I had discovered that that Yankee traveller was really a detective."

"But why? I should have thought it rather pleasant to find myself mistaken in that particular instance, I think."

"No—don't you see, it would have set my mind at rest? Ever since I found out that the man was really an innocent being I've been wondering who sent that telegram. Every time you and the Princess and I leave the Castle I wonder if somebody is watching us from behind a tree or a wall. I often wake in the night and wonder if the Princess is safe, and if someone has not entered the Castle, poisoned Peter, strangled poor old Deasy, and abstracted the jewels."

"Nerves, my dear Cosmo, nerves!" she said. "I never have any fears of that sort. I'm convinced that the jewels are quite safe, and that no one could get into the Castle for the purpose of carrying Amirel away. She is somewhat weighty to begin with—twelve stone, my dear Cosmo—and there is another detail which may interest you—she sleeps with a revolver under her pillow."

"I wish she wouldn't," I said, with some fervor. "It's dangerous."

"Oh, she has done that for years. However, your anxieties will not be of lengthy duration—Sir Desmond Adare will be here in little more than a fortnight," said Nancy with an emphasis which seemed to suggest that in her opinion the coming of the Princess's lover would settle every problem presented to us.

"Aye!" said I. "There's another matter, Nancy; you and I are old friends,"—she looked up quickly from the fancy work which lay on her knee,—"very old friends, eh?"

"Very old friends," she repeated.

"Then we can afford the luxury of telling the exact truth to each other," I continued. "It's only old friends, or true friends, who can afford it—for truth's as expensive as it's unpleasant."

"Drop your cynicism, Cosmo, and say what you mean," she said.

"Well, then, what I mean is this—how will Sir Desmond Adare take my presence here as watch-dog to his future wife, eh, Nancy? How will he take it—what will he think about it?"

"I should think he will feel very grateful to you," she answered, readily enough. "He ought to feel grateful, at any rate."

"I don't know whether he will or whether he ought." I said. "Let's indulge a little more in the luxurious truth.

Supposing I were in Sir Desmond Adare's place, should I like to find my future wife guarded by a man who at one time built up a pretty reputation as a gambler and a drunkard—"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, interrupting me with signs of trouble in eyes and voice. "Is there any need to—"

"Lots of need, Nancy," I replied. "The truth, you know, the unpalatable truth—that priceless delicacy which we all admire so much and keep hidden away in the safest receptacle of our moral store-closet. Frankly, I don't think Sir Desmond will like to find me here. He'll probably be very polite, feel intensely vexed, and dismiss me with great courtesy. Nancy, here's some more plain truth—you and I are a couple of fools. You were foolish in asking me to undertake this work: I was foolish in accepting your offer of employment in it. We're all in embarrassing and compromising positions —that's a positive fact."

"If you wish to resign your commission, Mr. Hanmer, you may do so," she said, very seriously.

"I don't—for some reasons I wish I did. But I don't, Nancy, and I won't. I intend to safeguard the Princess Amirel until Sir Desmond Adare arrives, and I'll answer to him for everything. I'm honest in this adventure, at any rate."

"Then why should you have talked to me in this fashion?" she demanded. "You appear to forget that it was I who arranged all this. I was nearly at my wits' end

when I met you so curiously—I wish you knew how glad I was to see you. You see, I remembered how full of resource you used to be in the old days—"

"All right, Nancy," I said, interrupting her. "Don't bother; the devil of the whole thing is that I've a past, and it keeps lifting its ugly head. If one could only blot it out of existence, forget all about it—"

"You make such wonderful efforts to do that, don't you, Cosmo?" she said, gathering her work together and making for the door. "You do try, don't you, poor dear, to put it all away from you, to stamp it out, to make it as if it had never been? You never talk or think about it, do you—you never waste a moment in telling yourself how sorry you are that you have a past? Oh, you—you goose!" cried Nancy, with her hand on the door. You unutterable baby! Why don't you give up vaporing about the past, and think a little of the—shall we say future, Cosmo?"

Then the door slammed upon her merry laughter and her handsome, mocking face, and I put my hands deep into my pockets, and felt as if I had been whipped. There was no mistaking the meaning of Nancy's words, spoken in Nancy's most dulcet tones—and she has one of the sweetest voices that ever woman possessed—and that meaning discharged itself upon my inner consciousness with the force of an explosive bullet. So I had been vaporing, had I? And perhaps whining a little? Well, she was right—perfectly right. What had I to do

with the past, after all? It was gone, and the future was yet to come, and the things to come are generally better than the things that have gone. And—here was a new thought—there were two women—women!—in the world who had lifted me a long way towards better things by giving me their trust and confidence. Nancy was right—there must be no more vaporing. If I had been a fool in the past that was no reason why I should continually spoil the present by reminding myself of dead follies.

But however much you may resolve to have done with the past, there remains the unpleasant fact that the past may not have resolved to have done with you, and ere that day was over I was reminded of it in a fashion that was far from palatable. After Nancy had administered her moral castigation, I took my hat and stick and set out for a long walk which eventually ended in Ennis. It was five o'clock when I arrived there, and the afternoon being something more than warm I decided to drink a cup of tea before returning to the Castle. Turning into a quiet-looking, old-fashioned hotel which stood in a large garden under the shadow of the cathedral, I found my way to the coffee-room and ordered what I wanted. There was another man in the room who was eating a late luncheon or an early dinner and giving all his attention to it. As I turned from the waiting-maid and advanced towards an easy chair which stood invitingly near the hearth, the man lifted his head and looked

at me, and I recognized him at once as an old orderly of mine, who was in a position to recall plenty of ugly facts and unpleasant memories concerning me if he chose to do so.

The recognition was mutual enough. The man did not even stare or seem surprised to see me. He half rose from his chair and his hands moved as if he meant to salute me—then he dropped back with a sickly sort of grin on his face, and made what was obviously intended for a deferential bow. I stared him out of countenance before I spoke.

"Oh, is that you, Jefferson?" I said. "Dear me! I last saw you at Ahmednagar, I think."

"Yes, sir," he replied. "It was at Ahmednagar, six years ago that is, sir." His tone was polite enough, but there was a look on his face that was full of sinister meaning. He was a big, fat, smooth-faced man, with very small, sly eyes, and he had put on a lot of flesh since I had known him in India. He seemed, indeed, to be bursting with fatness, and the very loud suit of checked tweed which he wore and which appeared to have been built for a much slimmer man did not improve his looks. A heavy cable chain was festooned across his stomach, and one or two diamond rings sparkled on his fat fingers—his whole appearance was that of an outside bookmaker, or a sporting publican, and the white billycock hat which rested on the table at his elbow further accentuated that impression.

"Left the service, Jefferson?" I said in a casual sort of fashion as I sat down and reached out for a newspaper.

The man went on chewing his food—chewing it in a noisy, animal fashion; his great jaws worked steadily as he replied to my question.

"Yes, sir. I left it some little time ago—about the same time as you did, sir, I should think," he answered. "Bought my discharge, sir."

"Oh, indeed!" I said. "I hope you are doing well in civil life."

"I have nothing to complain of, sir," he replied, with an unctuous inflection of voice that made me long to kick him out of the room. "There's advantages and disadvantages in every walk of life, sir, as you're no doubt aware. We all of us have our ups and downs."

I gave him a long stare as he went on eating—he continued his meal with apparent unconsciousness of the fact that he was being scrutinized. I could not quite reconcile his outward appearance with his voice and his manner. "Sport" in its lowest sense was written in big characters all over him; his manner was that of a dissenting parson, his tones as gentle as those of a dove. But there was a sneaking, shifty trick of speech and look about him—his little, beady, twinkling eyes, almost hidden by the rolls of fat which hung in creases on his oily face, seemed to harbor a perpetual watchfulness. I turned from the contemplation of him with a feeling of disgust.

"Oh," I said. "Very good philosophy, no doubt, Jefferson. You seem to bear the ups and downs with considerable equanimity, though. I'm afraid you wouldn't get into the old uniform now, eh?"

"It's a family tendency, sir," he replied. "I'm a moderate man in every way—never drink, sir, and most temperate in my meals—but it comes on me. You're looking much better yourself, sir, than when you was at Ahmednagar."

There was no mistaking the sneer at that time, respectful as the man's tone was. Well—I had brought it on myself—I should have known better than to enter into conversation with him.

"Oh, I am very well indeed, thank you, Jefferson," I replied; and the maid bringing in my tea just then I gave my attention to it and the newspaper, and displayed no further outward notice of the man's presence. Inwardly, I fumed because of it—it galled me to think that such a man possessed memories of me which he doubtless gloated over and took good care to keep green. It was all very well to talk about forgetting the past, but how was one to forget it with an occasional reminder of this sort coming up?"

The unctuous voice broke in on my unpleasant reverie.

"You'll find the tea very good in Ireland, sir! I always say that I'd give a good deal to get so good a cup of tea in England as you can get here. I've tried it in

many places—from hotels down to what you might call roadside cabins—and it's always better than what you can get across the water, sir."

"Oh, you think so, do you?" I said very curtly.

"Yes, sir, and I ought to know, for I use tea a good deal. I've been an abstainer, sir for some years now. I saw a good deal of intemperance in the army sir, in my time. I find I'm a good deal better without liquor, sir."

"Oh, indeed!" I said, feeling that if this went on much longer I must kick him.

"Yes, sir, I firmly agree with Lord Roberts, sir, about the deleterious effects of intoxicating liquors. There's been many men ruined by them, sir, as you're no doubt well aware; especially in the service, sir, where there's so much opportunity—"

I put a strong curb on myself—it would never do to have a scene with this fellow in the coffee-room of an hotel.

"I'm afraid you're turning temperance lecturer, Jefferson," I said, with a poor attempt to throw some pleasantness into my voice. "I hear it's a good trade."

"Thank you, sir, but I don't hold with spouting on platforms. Moral suasion is my remedy for all them things."

"Moral suasion is a capital remedy," I said, drinking off my tea. "Well, good-day to you, Jefferson."

"Good-day to you sir, and my best respects" he said, again half-rising from his place. "It's quite a pleas-

ure to see a familiar face so far away from home."

I gave him a careless nod and walked out. The sight of him had put me in a bad temper. I would have given much for the pleasure of kicking the oily rascal round the garden and into the street. What was he doing there? Buying horses, perhaps, and trying to get round their sellers with his wheedling voice. He had always been a sneaking sort of chap—I remembered that the men used to call him "Greaser" because of his slippery ways and general unctuousness of mind and body. Bah! The encounter with him had left a nasty taste in my mouth, and it would require a double dose of Nancy Flynn's antidote to remove it.

My way homeward led me near the entrance to the railway station, and I turned in to buy a newspaper or two at the bookstall. The afternoon train from Limerick had just arrived, and there was a good deal of bustle and commotion on the platform. As I made my way through the throng I suddenly came face to face with two men who had just left the train and were engaged in animated conversation with a porter. One glance at them convinced me that the enemy had arrived—I was as sure that I was looking at the Prince of Amavia and the Graf von Hofberg as I was of my own existence.

I drew a little aside from the crowd and took a careful observation of the two strangers. One was a tall, slender, very graceful young man of something like thirty years of age; he was handsome in a rather ef-

feminate way: his features were regular; his complexion a pale olive; his expression goodnatured; his slim figure was set off to advantage by a well-cut flannel suit of dark grey. The other man was of medium height, rather florid in complexion, with fierce blue eyes and a moustache of pale yellow, bristling upwards from his lips; he was inclined to stoutness, and his figure was not improved by a Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers. He talked with an accompaniment of quick, jerky gestures; his companion appeared to take matters with indolent ease.

I watched these two men hire a car outside the station and drive away into the town. So certain was I that the slender man was Prince Adalbert and the stout man the Graf von Hofberg that I took a car myself and drove straight off to Annalleen. By good luck I found Nancy in the stone hall, and to her I narrated the latter part of the afternoon's adventures.

"Yes," she said, when I had made an end of my story. "Your conjectures are quit right, Cosmo—these men are the men you took them for. You are only mistaken in one respect—the tall, slender young man with the regular features and the goodnatured expression is not the Prince of Amavia, but the wicked Graf von Hofberg; and the somewhat fat person with the yellow moustache and the blue eyes is not the wicked Graf, but the bearish and weak-minded Prince."

CHAPTER XI

IN THE STYLE OF COMIC OPERA

I RECEIVED this piece of information with an astonishment which was evidently reflected in my face, for Nancy began to laugh.

"You are somewhat simple, my dear Cosmo," she said with that calm air of proprietorship which she had assumed ever since I had entered into her service. "It is a characteristic of yours—always was, I fancy. I suppose you took the Prince for the Graf because of his bristling moustache and blue eyes, and the Graf for the Prince because of his lazy looks?"

"You told me the other day that von Hofberg was a desperado—the sort of man who could use a two-handed sword," I replied. "This man hasn't the appearance of a swashbuckler."

"I believe he is considered to be one of the finest swordsmen on the Continent," she said, calmly. "He has killed a good many men in duels, at any rate. My dear Cosmo, I will tell you what Fritz von Hofberg is. He is one of the devil's many incarnations—his nice looking, rather pretty, boyish face is a mask for his evil brain; his nice, melancholy eyes and his smooth

tongue are as much implements of his trade as a good steel jimmy and a dependable centre-bit are the necessaries of the burglar. You see, I know something of him."

"So it would appear," I muttered, wondering why she spoke so positively and with some slight trace of personal feeling in her voice.

"And so I will give you a piece of sound advice," she continued, ignoring the interruption. "Now that these two precious scamps have appeared on the scene we shall see something of them whether we want to or not. It's possible that you, being a man, will see more of them than Amirel or myself will. Well, listen—be most on your guard against Fritz von Hofberg when he seems least dangerous. When he lays his rapier aside, get a tighter grip on your own; when his eye leaves yours, watch him all the more closely. Are you warned?"

"I am much interested," I replied. "And perhaps a little amused."

She looked at me in a curious way and shook her head.

"We must tell Amirel of this at once," she said. "She will not be surprised, for she has expected the arrival of these two every day since we came here. Now that they are here, however, she will want to prepare a reception for them."

"Do you mean that she will receive them—here?" I said, somewhat astonished that Nancy should hint at such a thing.

"She will certainly admit them to parley," she answered. "Haven't you observed, Cosmo, that Amirel loves to play her part in the grand style? She loves to see the stage well filled, to hear the band in full swing, to bring the curtain down on a fine situation. It is her only foible—in all other respects she is the sweetest woman living."

"I don't see the necessity for any theatrical display in this business," I responded. "And, by-the-bye, Nancy, I rather understood that I was engineering everything? Don't you remember that we agreed that I should act as captain on this adventure?"

"You may captain me as much as you please," she answered, laughing. "I'm a meek and mild person, Cosmo; but I think Amirel only agrees to be obedient so long as obedience suits her whim. After all, she is a princess."

"Say, rather—after all, she is a woman!" I exclaimed. "Well—I shall oppose anything in the theatrical line—princess or no princess."

"Will you? Well, you will have a run for your money," she retorted; "but that will be all the satisfaction you'll get out of it. Amirel will manage this part of the proceedings in her own way, my dear Cosmo."

"And supposing I throw up my commission?"

"She will be very sorry, very polite, and accept your resignation."

I put my hands in my pockets for the second time that afternoon and went off to my own room, feeling that women are strange creatures. I had fondly imagined myself the stay and protection of two defenceless damsels who, at the outset of our adventures, had earnestly protested their need of succour; it now appeared that they, or, at any rate, one of them, possessed the bravery of lions, and was prepared to rend and ravage anything that barred the path. What, then, was I doing in this galley—what part was I playing in the piece? The part of tame pussy-cat apparently—and a pussy-cat with clipped claws. Well, it was an adventure, after all, and if it yielded nothing else it yielded amusement. It would satisfy me if only amusement resulted; the genuine desire to serve the Princess, to save her from annoyance, was as strong within me as when I first set eyes upon her, and I resented the notion that in the coming contest with her enemies she should enter the arena herself instead of permitting me to play the part of her champion.

But when we came to tell the Princess of my news it was immediately made evident that she not only intended to fight for herself, but that she rather enjoyed the prospect of doing so. Her eyes sparkled, her face became animated, she clapped her hands as a very young girl would at the sight of a new doll or a box of bonbons.

"Ah, so they have come!" she exclaimed. "Then we

shall have amusement and diversion until Desmond arrives. We are now in a state of siege—Desmond will raise the siege. Well, let us consider what we shall do. First of all we must examine our resources. Mr. Hanmer, I appoint you my—what do you call it?—aide-de-camp, or chief of staff? You—"

"Pardon me, Princess," I said, feeling that was the time to make a stroke for power. "I quite fail to see the relevance of this. May I state my views on this matter in very plain language?"

"Oh, yes!" she answered, regarding me with a look of surprise.

"Then," I continued, speaking in tones which were intended to be as stern as they were firm, "I am under the impression that, according to the terms of our agreement made in London, I am in supreme command of—of all this, don't you know? I—I thought everything was to be entrusted to me—that I was to arrange all matters, that—" Here I began to wobble pitifully, so earnestly did she regard me with her childlike, candid eyes. "That—well, I—I had a sort of idea, you know, that—well, that I was commander-in-chief. And of course you know, Princess, a commander-in-chief can't give up his part to anyone, eh?"

She looked at me for a moment in the same childlike fashion, then a smile began to twinkle around the corners of her mouth, and her eyes danced with fun.

"Oh!" she said. "But I'm afraid you are quite wrong;

we seem to be at cross-purposes somehow, and what a pity it is. Of course I am commander-in-chief; how could it be otherwise? It couldn't, could it, now?"

I looked at Nancy—Nancy looked at me with inscrutable eyes, in the recesses of which, very far back, sat a little devil who mocked me. I looked at the Princess, swam into deep waters, and went down.

"Oh, of course!" I answered. "My mistake entirely, Princess. I apologize for being such an unutterable ass. Yes, of course, I see I am—eh?—chief of staff?"

"That is so kind of you," she said. "Yes, let me see, where were we—oh, about our resources, or shall I say our forces?"

"Each is a good word," I answered. "But may I ask what we are going to do? Is it in contemplation to make a sortie?"

The Princess looked displeased; I think she frowned a little.

"I am quite serious, Mr. Hanmer," she said. "Stay! I see that you are regarding all this as a sort of joke."

"If I may speak quite frankly," I replied, "I don't know what it means."

"It means this," she said. "Adalbert and the Graf von Hofberg are here, and to-morrow they will wish to see me. I intend to see them and to talk with them. I shall, in fact, give them an interview; I wish that interview to take place in the courtyard outside, and in the presence of as many men as we can muster."

"But is not that rather unnecessary and rather theatrical?" I objected.

"It is necessary," she answered. "I know these two men better than you know them, and there is only one thing for which they have any respect. That, Mr. Hanmer, is force. I wish them to see that I am securely guarded, and that any attempt on their part to molest me will be strenuously resisted."

"I see," I replied. "But—why admit them at all, Princess—why waste time in parleying with them?"

She laughed softly and looked at Nancy, who also laughed, and responded to the look with another, full of understanding and intelligence.

"Perhaps for the pleasure of—telling them my mind, Mr. Hanmer," replied the Princess.

This remarkable speech reduced me to silence. When I found my tongue again it was to ask the Princess for definite instructions.

"Find out how many able-bodied men there are about the Castle, please, Mr. Hanmer," she answered. "And let it be known that I require their presence to-morrow morning. No one must leave the Castle without my permission. My dear brother and his friend are absolutely certain to favor us with an early call, and I should like to receive them in state."

I went off, much chastened and subdued in spirit, to find Deasy and obtain the necessary information. Feeling somewhat embarrassed about doing so, I contrived

to give them some notion of what was in the Princess's mind: to my infinite surprise the idea seemed to strike him as possessing all the elements of common sense. He began to count up his men with all the zest of a company sergeant.

"Well, sir," he said, "there is myself—that's one, and there is Dennis and Phelim, the footmen, that is three, and Michael Fogerty, the chauffeur, that is four, and William, the second chauffeur, that is five, and there is Patrick and James and Joseph, the grooms, will make eight, and Timothy Keane, the gardener, and his man Connor, will be ten. There is also the gamekeeper, Rafferty—he will be here this evening and I will bid him come in the morning; that is eleven strong men, and if needs be there is Muldoon, the farmer across the park there, would be glad to step across and give a hand."

"Thanks, Deasy," I said, hastily; "but I think eleven men quite sufficient—I can make a twelfth myself if it is necessary. I—I think the Princess merely intends to let her—her pursuers see that she is well protected, you know."

"Oh, I understand exactly, sir," he replied. "A demonstration in force, sir."

"Yes—yes: a demonstration in force," I replied and hurried away, secretly inclined to laugh at the whole thing. It seemed to me that in thus marshalling our army we were perilously near an approach to the very edge of the thin line which separates the world of

realities from the regions of burlesque and comic opera. Deasy, however, appeared to possess no scruples of this sort. He came hurrying after me, a piece of wash leather in one hand, a half polished entree dish in the other.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said; "but would the Princess like the men to be uniformed and armed?"

"What!" I gasped.

"There is a uniform provided, sir; but it is only worn on great days: we were not looking to put it on until the day of Sir Desmond's home-coming," he replied, beginning to polish his dish. "It is a Lincoln green coat—something like an archer's, sir—buff breeches, high boots like the Cavaliers used to wear, sir—and a great hat with eagle's feathers. And there are plenty of rifles in the armory, sir."

I was now more amused than ever, and the devil entered into me.

"I think that's a capital idea, Deasy," I answered. "I tell you what—we will say nothing of this to the Princess, but let the men parade before her in the courtyard to-morrow morning at ten o'clock sharp—yourself in command."

Deasy bowed low over his dish and his wash leather.

"Very good, sir—all shall be done," he said.

I ran upstairs to my own room, threw myself on my bed, and burst into shrieks of uncontrollable laughter. It seemed to me that we were going to rehearse some scene from a comic opera, and that in order to sustain

the whole thing worthily, the Princess, Nancy, and myself ought to attire ourselves in some costume more fitting to our various parts than the prosaic nineteenth-century garments which we were wearing. I began to wonder what Sir Desmond Adare would say if he suddenly returned and found his servitors arrayed in their Lincoln green, and armed, incongruously enough, with modern rifles. But the whole thing was so incongruous that it was idle to speculate upon it—all that one could do was to allow the Princess to have her own way in everything, and trust that no harm would result from this giving way to her whims. Of one thing I was resolved: if Prince Adalbert and his friend the Graf came to the Castle I would take good care that they were seen safely off the premises, and that they did not under any pretext cross the actual threshold of Sir Desmond's house.

To the Princess the proceedings which inaugurated the following day's work were full of interest and very productive of delight. Deasy paraded his men at ten o'clock, and as they were all well-set-up fellows and full of a natural pride in their picturesque uniform, they looked very imposing. Deasy himself had laid aside the manners of the butler and assumed those of the drill-sergeant, and he put his small army through a few evolutions with much evident personal gratification. Then followed a conference between the Princess and myself—a conference which speedily became a mere

issuing of instructions from her to her army. She bade close the gates: posted a sentinel on the tower: drew six men up in a convenient position near the gateway, and four in the centre of the courtyard, and permitted all to stand at ease until further orders. Deasy carried out every instruction with a gravity which filled me with wonder—I myself could scarcely refrain from laughter as I looked around the courtyard and glanced at the motionless figure of the sentinel on the tower above. Every preparation had been made—near the gateway five chairs had been placed; a group of three on one side, of two on the other, with an open space of a few yards between them: here the conference was to take place, within sight, but out of hearing, of our army.

"It is exactly like a scene from a comic opera," I contrived to whisper to Nancy as we followed the Princess into the Castle.

"Very well, my dear Cosmo," she replied. "Call it so, by all means. Let us hope that no element of tragedy may creep in when the villain of the piece makes his appearance."

CHAPTER XII

THE GRAF VON HOFBERG

THE proceedings of that very eventful morning began with a punctuality which would have been highly satisfactory to the feelings of a conscientious stage-manager, but when once the curtain was rung up on our mimic stage it was to discover the first of a series of surprises for which none of us were altogether prepared. At precisely half-past ten o'clock Deasy appeared in the stone hall and announced that a car had entered the demesne by the east gate. Five minutes later he appeared again, this time to communicate the somewhat mystifying news that the vehicle contained but one occupant and was now within easy distance of the Castle. For the first time since she had taken command of our proceedings the Princess looked surprised —she had been so confident that the Prince and the Graf would appear on the scene together that Deasy's news took her as much aback as a stage-manager would have been had two Hamlets stalked upon the platform before the Castle of Elsinore where but one was expected. I think that for one wild moment she half wondered whether the solitary occupant of the car was Sir

Desmond, returned by some hitherto unknown method of marvellous speed—then the wonder died out of her face, and with a wave of the hand she dismissed Deasy for further information. When he had disappeared she sat down again in an attitude of thought, and Nancy and I, watching her intently, kept silence. It was plain that our commander-in-chief was perturbed. Deasy returned to us about ten minutes later. He advanced up the hall, clicked his heels together, saluted with a comical admixture of the smart soldier and the precise serving-man, and said in a herald-like voice:

"The Graf von Hofberg, Chancellor of the Principality and Duchy of Amavia, craves permission to confer with Mr. Hanmer on matters of great importance."

The Princess rose from her seat. She glanced at me, then at Nancy, and finally looked upon Deasy with bent brows.

"The Graf wishes to see Mr. Hanmer? Did not he ask permission to enter my presence?" she said in her deepest tones.

"If it please Your Highness," answered Deasy, who was playing up to his part in wonderful style, "that was the only message the gentleman delivered. I have repeated word for word what he said."

The Princess bit her lip and looked round her as if she were scarcely sure of her surroundings.

"Insolent!" she said at last, with as pretty an intonation as ever I heard. For a moment I thought she

was going to stamp her foot—instead, she raised her right hand and pointed to the door.

"Go!" she said. "Bid the Graf von Hofberg return to whence he came."

For a full moment I had been meditating a bold stroke—a stroke which would restore to me the power which I had foolishly allowed myself to be tricked out of. I stepped forward.

"Stay, Deasy," I said, quietly. "Withdraw to the porch—I will give you further orders presently."

The Princess turned upon me with the swiftness of a serpent; a gleam of unmistakable anger shot from her usually placid eyes.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed. "My orders—"

I raised my hand deprecatingly, bowing my head at the same time.

"Pardon me, Princess," I said. "I would dare everything—even your displeasure—in your behalf. I allowed myself to relinquish my duty as captain of this adventure last night—this morning I assume my old, my proper responsibility. The Graf von Hofberg desires audience of me—I propose to grant his request. Meanwhile, I desire you both to retire to your apartments."

I gazed at her steadily as I spoke—she stood immediately before me, her cheek flushed, her eyes blazing, her hands clenched. She was now positively angry, and in her anger she looked ten times more beautiful. Before she could speak my glance passed her and fell on

Nancy, who standing behind her, was plainly enjoying the scene with a hearty appetite. It was evident, indeed, that Nancy was ready to break into an Irish jig with whole-souled appreciation of the position: her eyes and mouth signalled encouragement over the Princess's shoulder. I gained new courage.

"I trust that you will obey my orders with proper submission," I continued. "It would give me much pain to be obliged to resort to harsh measures."

She stared at me as if she thought I had taken leave of my senses.

"Obey—your—orders?" she said, at last. "Submission! How dare you thus address me?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I beg you both to retire," I said, with what I fervently hoped was a creditable imitation of pathetic entreaty.

The Princess looked at me once more—this time she did stamp her foot.

"I refuse to retire!" she exclaimed.

"I am sorry," I said. "It leaves but one course open to me." I assumed my sternest demeanor and my deepest tone of voice. "Deasy!"

Deasy, with the precise movements of an automaton, shot in from the porch, where he had doubtless listened to all that had passed. He saluted briskly.

"Sir?"

I pointed to the door which formed the only means

of communication between the stone hall and the rest of the house.

"Lock that door," I commanded.

"Yes, sir."

"Put the key in your pocket."

"Yes, sir—it is done, sir."

"Return to the Graf von Hofberg, make my apologies for the delay, and conduct him to a seat in the courtyard."

"Yes, sir."

He saluted again, turned right about face, and marched out with his chin in the air. I bowed to the Princess, walked across to the outer door, and taking the key from the inside, transferred it to the outside. As it grated in the lock the Princess spoke again.

"Stay! You dare to lock me in here? You dare!"

"Permit me to remind you, Princess," I replied, "that I have already told you that I dare anything in your service."

She stared at me with eyes full of a wonderful incredulousness. It was plain that she had never found herself in such a situation before.

"I will not endure such an insult and such an outrage!" she burst out. "Nancy!—do you allow this?"

But she had no chance of stirring Nancy Flynn, who had already deserted to the insurgent and was encouraging him in every possible way. Nancy had taken up a position on the hearth; her arms were folded, her fingers

tapped her elbows; her attitude was one of resignation mingled with a certain amount of lofty scorn: she might have been a Christian martyr in whom some old leaven of pagan feeling still lingered.

"I'm afraid it's not a question of choice," said Nancy. "It's the way of the male brute, my dear. Let the man do what he pleases—he'll have his own way in spite of anything we can say or do—don't you see it in his face?"

The Princess looked at me with a glance which changed in one swift moment from anger and surprise to despair and entreaty—with a mighty effort I contrived to preserve my stern demeanor. Suddenly, with an exclamation of "Oh!—if only Desmond were here!" she turned away, sank into a chair, and buried her face in her arms. I closed the door with unnecessary violence; turned the key in the lock, and walked out of the porch in all the pride of victory. With the remembrance of such an encounter still hot in my soul I felt prepared to meet any adversary who cared to present himself, and I held my head high as I strode across the sunlit courtyard to keep tryst with the Graf von Hofberg.

He stood near the chairs which had been arranged for a much larger conference, Deasy standing a little in front of him with a stiffness of an escort in charge of a prisoner. The Graf wore a dark flannel suit, a straw hat, and brown boots; he carried a light cane and pearl-grey gloves, there was a bright flower in his buttonhole, and his appearance was altogether very pleasant

and summery. As he stood awaiting my approach his glance wandered from one side of the courtyard to another; it lingered for a moment on the men in Lincoln green ere it passed to the sentinel on the tower, but no emotion of surprise or amusement crossed his face. The Graf appeared mildly interested, and his mild interest was of that degree which one sees in the traveller who has explored a hundred and one cathedrals and is perforce obliged to make an inspection of yet one more.

But as I drew near to him his expression changed. He looked me over in one swift glance ere he swept himself half-way to the ground in a courtly bow, and when he lifted his face I saw that he was as keenly alert to the exigencies of the moment as a duellist should be when he raises his rapier to the salute. I bowed with equal show of respect; at the same instant Deasy saluted, and retired several paces to the rear.

"The Graf von Hofberg," said I, murmuring his name with much polite inflection.

"Mr. Meredith Cosmo Gordon Hanmer," said he, in studiously polite accents.

"Accept my sincere regrets for my apparent rudeness, Graf," I began. "In these days one is not altogether master of one's own time and movements. Permit me to offer you a seat and my sincere apologies for receiving you in the open air."

"I thank you," said he, seating himself after another courtly bow. "Pray do not apologize, Mr. Hanmer. In

this weather and in this delightful country, the open air seems to me much more to be preferred than the interior of house or castle."

"It is extremely kind of you to say so," I made answer, as I seated myself. "You will further permit me to offer you some refreshment?—the morning is warm and the Irish roads are famous for their superabundance of dust."

"I thank you once more," he replied. "It is as you say, Mr. Hanmer—the dust of these roads is apt to make one thirsty."

I summoned Deasy with a look.

"Refreshment for the Graf von Hofberg," I said.

The soldier immediately disappeared; Deasy was once more the capable and confidential serving-man.

"Yes, sir," he said. He looked at the Graf with obvious interest. "What may I get for your lordship?" he inquired, very respectfully.

The Graf knitted his brows over this delicate problem. Deasy's interest gained in strength.

"If I may advise your lordship," he said, "champagne and seltzer is excellent on a warm morning, and we have fresh ice in the cellars."

The Graf's countenance brightened.

"A most praiseworthy suggestion," he said. "The mere notion of ice is exhilarating—thank you."

Deasy hurried away; the Graf once more examined his surroundings.

"A charming place, Mr. Hanmer," he remarked, "and full of that picturesqueness which to my mind is one of the most striking features of this most interesting country. I approve Sir Desmond Adare's habit of clothing his retainers in a distinctive uniform—in my opinion we nineteenth century folk have not sufficient love of the romantic and picturesque—our forebears knew the value of both. In my own castle I endeavor to keep up as far as possible the good old customs of medieval times; but this is a degenerate age so far as poetry and the love of beauty are concerned, and one is apt to be much misunderstood by persons whose tastes are wholly utilitarian."

He chatted on in this pleasant manner until Deasy returned with a tray whereon were set forth the necessary materials for the Graf's refreshment. In order to appear thoroughly resolved to carry out our conference in an amicable and friendly fashion I joined him in a bumper of champagne and seltzer, and when Deasy had once more exchanged his rôle of butler for that of soldier, and retired out of hearing, we pledged each other, paid a compliment to Sir Desmond's cellar and cigars, and for a few moments smoked and sipped in great amity. I only hoped that the Princess and Nancy were watching us from the windows of the stone hall —I knew how the scene would amuse Nancy, and how the Princess would resent my apparent defiance of her wishes.

We passed a little time in necessary meditation and a little more in interchange of innocent remarks ere the Graf addressed himself to the business of the moment. At last he spoke. It was a pleasure to hear him speak; he possessed a peculiarly soothing voice, and his English was perfect—there was a straightforwardness, too, about his address which appeared to be of the essence of absolute candor, and he had a trick of looking you straight in the eye not only whilst he spoke to you but while you spoke to him—an accomplishment which is particularly rare, even amongst men whose honesty conforms to the conventional standard.

"Mr. Hanmer," he began, "let us proceed to business. I think we understand each other quite well on certain points. Suppose I rehearse our little history in very brief terms, so that you may correct me if I am in error as regards any detail? The Princess Amirel of Amavia has deserted her rightful place in the court of her brother, the reigning prince, and has flown to this Castle, the ancestral home of her lover, Sir Desmond Adare, in the company and under the protection of her friend Miss Selma St. Clair and yourself. Here she proposes to remain until Sir Desmond's arrival. So far I am right?"

"With some difference of opinion as to the exact importance and significance to be attached to the word 'deserted,' you appear to be perfectly right, Graf," I replied.

"I quite agree that there will be difference of opinion,"

he said. "Well, to proceed—I am perfectly right in saying that my sovereign, His Highness the Prince of Amavia, and I, his Chancellor and most intimate adviser, have arrived in this neighborhood in order to bring about a much-desired result in the return of the Princess to her rightful place. In furtherance of a desire to achieve that result I, at my sovereign's express wish, now pay this visit to you, Mr. Hanmer."

"I believe you are absolutely correct as to all your facts, Graf," I said: "but I do not quite understand why you visit me. I am here as representative of the Princess, and as her appointed defender until the arrival of Sir Desmond Adare, and I may at once say that Her Highness will certainly not return."

"Ah, pardon, pardon!" he exclaimed, interrupting me. "Of her present state of mind what need is there to speak? But we are men—men of the world, you and I, Mr. Hanmer, and we must speak as such men. I take it that you desire great candor on my part, even as I desire to find it in you?"

"It will give me much pleasure to be candid," I replied.

"Then we will indulge in plain truth," said he. "Mr. Hanmer, the house of Amavia ranks amongst the most ancient in Europe. Of late years it has fallen on evil times—its prince is now but a vassal—the vassal of a man whose house is of comparatively recent origin—and much of its glory has faded. Nevertheless, it is still

the house of Amavia, and it is not meet that its daughter, the only woman representative of her race, should mate with her inferior, especially when that inferior is of alien race, and of no great rank in his own country."

"Sir Desmond Adare," I remarked, "is a baronet of the United Kingdom, and I believe that he can trace a direct descent from one of the ancient Irish kings."

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt!" he replied, carelessly waving the interruption aside. "But you must pardon me for remarking that your order of—do you call it baronetage?—was only established in the seventeenth century, and that every ragged Irishman whom one meets claims to carry royal blood in his veins. No, Mr. Hanmer—I am sure you will agree with me that the daughter of a long line of reigning sovereigns must not mate with one who, whatever his private worth may be, is much her inferior in rank. Such alliances tend to bring old-established precedents into contempt, and heaven knows that we are sufficiently democratized already!"

"However much I might be disposed to agree with you, Graf," I said, "My agreement would only be of the nature of theory. I am a practical man and believe in practical things."

"I am also devoted to the practical," he interrupted in a polite murmur.

"I am glad to hear it. Don't you think, then, that we had better face the practical aspect of this matter?

To my mind, it makes little difference to the Princess that Sir Desmond Adare is not of royal blood—for aught I know, he may be, or he may firmly believe that he is, descended from Heber and Heremon themselves, and 'tis three thousand years since they came into the country—the plain truth of the situation is that she means to marry him. She has come here for that purpose, and here she will remain, securely guarded, until Sir Desmond arrives."

"That is your theory," he replied, quietly. "It is with the precise intention of rendering it impossible to put that theory into practice that I am here, Mr. Hanmer."

"Ah!" I said. "And what will you do?"

He smoked and sipped in silence for a while and his thoughts appeared to be concentrated on the ash of his cigar. At last, "I love candor," he said. "You must know, Mr. Hanmer, that I intend to espouse the Princess Amirei of Amavia myself. My house is as ancient as her own—there is no stain on my lineage—my ancestors have won great fame and honors. To you I confess that I regard the match as one which would be peculiarly advantageous to me—the Princess is a rich woman; I am a poor man, full of ambition and resolved to become a power in Europe. You perceive then that this marriage with Sir Desmond Adare is quite out of the question."

"I am afraid I do not," I said, laughing at his cool assurance.

He favored me with a long stare. I went on talking, with rather a foolish feeling of elation strong within me.

"I'm afraid I do not," I repeated. "Pardon me if I remark that I doubt your power or that of anybody else to make the Princess Amirel alter her intention. In fact, Graf, I think I may safely prophesy that if you and the Prince of Amavia remain here for a little while, you will find that the Princess and Sir Desmond are safely and happily united. And our laws are such," I concluded, somewhat boastingly, "that any interference with the wife of Sir Desmond Adare—"

"Oh, yes, yes!" he exclaimed. "I understand you perfectly. If she is married to Sir Desmond Adare then the matter may be definitely ended, or it may be just beginning—one never knows. Of course, I say if she is married to him."

"He is travelling home hot-foot to marry her," I retorted.

"So I am given to understand," he said, musingly. "But there is much truth in that homely proverb of yours as to the possibilities of many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. You see, Mr. Hanmer, there is the contingency that Sir Desmond Adare may very much resent the fact that his intended bride is—" He did not complete his sentence, but waved his hand with a gesture which I could scarcely fail to understand.

"Your meaning, Graf?" I said, sternly.

"We agreed to be truthful and candid," he said,

quietly, "and there is therefore no need to avoid the obvious facts of the case. You see, Mr. Hanmer, it is a fact that the present companions of the Princess Amirel of Amavia are an opera singer and a person who was cashiered from the British army for drunkenness and gambling. That is the fact—it is one which, in my opinion, Sir Desmond will resent."

I stared at him in silence for a while. I was trying to think what devil's trick he was up to. My brains were as mud compared to his—I know that well enough. He was fashioning something now, for all his outward appearance of cool indifference, and I wanted to know what it was.

"As for Miss St. Clair," I began, lamely, "she—"

"Oh!" he said, "I know all about Miss St. Clair. Nancy Flynn is a charming woman; she possesses a beautiful voice; her slight touch of the brogue adds piquancy to her singing; she is exceedingly fond of the Princess and is altogether an interesting personality. But she is Nancy Flynn, daughter of the old Dublin music-master, and not the fitting confidante of a Princess of Amavia, just as you, Mr. Hanmer, with your record, are not the man to whom the guardianship of the Princess should have been confided. You and Nancy have made a mess of the business—to use another of your so-expressive English similes—and I think you will find that Sir Desmond Adare is of my opinion. Do you not perceive, Mr. Hanmer, that your presence here, that all that you have

done so far, all that you are doing now, will assist me rather than assist the Princess? Sir Desmond Adare is a proud man. Worse than that, he lacks two things. One, Mr. Hanmer, is imagination; the other is humour. You may picture to yourself what his feelings will be when he finds that the watchdog who has been selected to guard his future wife is—yourself."

He bowed low as he uttered the last word. His tones were the perfection of politeness, but there was the keenness of steel in them.

I remained silent for a moment. The Graf continued to smoke. His attitude was unchanged: watching him from a distance you would have said that his mind was as indolent as the pose of his body. His eyes watched the smoke curling away from his cigar; his fingers trifled carelessly with the stem of his glass; placid enjoyment of his immediate surroundings and of the blue sky and bright sunlight overhead was written large all over him.

I rose to my feet and put my hands in my pockets.

"As we are both such fervent devotees of candor," I said, looking down at him, "perhaps you will be good enough to tell me exactly what it is that you want of me. Don't be afraid of putting it in plain language—I prefer it."

"Excellently said!" he answered, coolly as ever. "Well, then, I want you. Remember, Mr. Hanmer, that I know all about you—everything about you. You've been un-

der close observation since your Quixotic adventure of the Princess and her jewels began. I know all that has taken place. I think that I can make great use of you—under me you can begin a new career, and your ambition, whatever it is, will have a chance of being gratified—"

"It will be gratified as things are, Graf," I interrupted.

"You are a soldier of fortune," he continued, taking no heed of what I had said. "So am I. You have been a great gambler—so have I. You have forsaken the tables—so have I, but only to play for bigger stakes elsewhere. Come and play with me, Mr. Hanmer. What is this Irishman to you that you should serve him? I know him; he will dismiss you with a curt nod—and a cheque. Serve me. If I give you nothing when I am down, I shall reward you beyond your expectations when I am up. Will you enter my service?"

I looked full in his eyes—he looked me full in mine, honestly enough.

"No!" I said.

He nodded his head and sighed.

"It is exactly what I expected of you," he said. "Well—I always try. You are making a mistake. I don't know where this adventure of yours will lead you, but I think I should have saved you much if you had deserted it for me. However, we are now on our old footing again, eh? Well, a little interchange of opinion between rival commanders is a welcome oasis in the desert of strife.

By-the-bye, Mr. Hanmer, what is your opinion as to the precise value of the lessons which one has gained from the war? For example—"

He drew his chair nearer to mine, and lighting another cigar, began to talk of recent military events. I became interested, and when he at length rose to take his leave I found that we had been talking for two hours, and that the men in Lincoln green looked decidedly weary.

CHAPTER XIII

MOONLIGHT AT MIDSUMMER

I ACCOMPANIED von Hofberg to the gateway; the driver of his car, tired of waiting, had long since gone to sleep, and Deasy was obliged to wake him into activity. As he prepared to take his seat the Graf held out his hand to me with a gesture full of charm and graciousness—for the life of me I could not help stretching out my own to meet it.

"Good-morning, Mr. Hanmer," he said, still urbane and polite as ever. "I am glad we have met, for it is always well that opponents should know each other. I need not say that in the little game which must now commence I shall hold you as an adversary of honor and of skill. Adieu!—when we meet again I trust it will be to arrange the terms of your capitulation."

I laughed and shook my head—it was impossible to frown upon a man whose every word and movement betokened an earnest desire to accept the facts of life in a spirit of fine philosophy.

"We will leave that to the time-spirit," I replied.

"Adieu!"

He waved his hand as the car moved off. I turned

back into the courtyard, and for a moment stood musing in the bright sunlight. A gentle cough roused me out of my abstraction—I looked up to find Deasy standing close at hand, regarding first me and then his small army with inquiring looks.

"Ah, yes!" I said. "I think you had better dismiss your men, Deasy. And Deasy, give me the key of the inner door of the stone hall."

I put the key in my pocket and went slowly across the courtyard. I had faced the Graf; I had now to face the Princess. Well—there was no use in being afraid of her; I had already transgressed beyond forgiveness, and I might as well carry out the policy which I had initiated with such boldness. It might be that in thus keeping a tight hold upon the reins of government I was doing the Princess good service—I would at any rate do my best to make her believe that I was of the impression that stern measures were best suited to her particular case.

When I admitted myself to the stone hall there were no signs of storm or of the indignation that gives promise of words. The Princess sat in one of the wide window-places, apparently calm and placid; her eyes were bent over some piece of fancy needlework about which her fingers moved with regular motions that seemed to indicate the possession of an unruffled temper. Near her sat Nancy, taking her ease in a low chair, and amusing herself with a novel. The stone hall was very still, and delightfully cool after the glare of the sunlight in the

courtyard; my voice sounded harsh and out of place as I stepped forward and spoke.

"I deeply regret," I said, "that I have been obliged to keep you here so long. Before I give you your liberty, it will perhaps be well if I say something as to the result of the duties which I have performed on your behalf, Princess, this morning. I feel it is necessary that I should request you to confine yourself strictly to the Castle until the arrival of Sir Desmond Adare; we appear to be invested, so to speak, by an implacable and a determined enemy, and I cannot countenance the running of any risk on your part. I need not, I am sure, ask for your assurance that my wishes will be obeyed; the reasonableness of all that I have done, and am about to do, must, of course, be quite obvious to you. I once more express my regret at this unfortunate detention. It is now at an end."

With this I marched across to the inner door, unlocked it, and threw it open. The Princess arose from her seat with much dignity and deliberation. Gathering her work and her skirts together she swept across the floor and passed me with a stately inclination of the head, which, under any other circumstances, would have symbolized the immensity of the gulf that stretched between us. Nancy followed; her eyes were still bent upon her book, but as she passed me she shot a glance into mine which was made up of fun, roguery, and full enjoyment of the situation. It was abundantly evident

that she fully approved my recent proceedings, and I was glad of it—it seemed to me that I should want as much countenance and sympathy as it was possible to get before this adventure came to its end.

Over a cigar in the smoking-room I meditated for a long time on the events of the morning. It was plain to me that in von Hofberg I had met an adversary of remarkable ability—no common adventurer would have opened his mind so freely or with such absolute candor. True, his candor was valueless, considering that it was exhibited to me solely. He might, had he pleased, have told me that he intended to murder us all, carry off the Princess and her jewels, and set fire to Annalleen Castle—considering that I was his only audience he would have been quite safe in indulging in any wild fancy that chanced to come into his mind. The longer I ruminated upon the Graf's conversation, sentiments, and ideas, the more confused and puzzled I became. It was, of course, perfectly certain that he had visited the Castle in pursuance of some definite scheme, that he had a specific reason for coming to us at all. Two questions then agitated my mind—the first, what was von Hofberg's precise object; the second, had he achieved or done anything towards achieving it? Various answers to the first of these questions occurred to me. He might have desired to see the Castle and examine its defences. He might have wished to see me and to find out what manner of man I was. He might have had a genuine

notion that I, the disgraced and penniless army officer, could be bought over to his service. He might—but what was the use of speculating about these things? I flung them away from my mind as I threw the end of my cigar from my fingers, and went to lunch, only certain of one thing—that I intended to keep the Princess out of von Hofberg's clutch until her rightful defender arrived. I was not quite certain how I would do it, but I had a great belief in British pertinacity as opposed to Continental subtlety, and I meant to be pertinacious to the last.

On meeting me at luncheon the Princess made no reference to the affairs of the morning.

She was somewhat reserved and a little distant in manner, and once or twice she appeared to be very deep in thought. She disappeared immediately after leaving the table, and Nancy and myself were left alone.

"Come into the smoking-room," I said. "I want to talk to you. Now," I continued, when we were in strict privacy, "have I conducted this morning's operations in accordance with your views of the situation?"

"Yes, I think so," she answered. "Amirel is, of course, piqued by the calm way in which you ignored her wishes and plans; but I am quite sure that she secretly applauds all you have done, and will eventually tell you so. You see, she has always been accustomed to having her own way in everything—it will do her good to feel that she is not quite an autocrat. Yes, I think you have

done very well. By-the-bye, Cosmo, what did you do?"

"Ah!" I said. "That's a question I can't answer, my dear Nancy. I don't know what I did, nor what von Hofberg did—I have been puzzling my brains about it ever since. Let's see if your woman's wit can help us to arrive at any conclusion."

I proceeded to relate to Nancy every detail of the conversation which had taken place between the Graf and myself. Like the sensible woman that she was she listened in perfect silence, only nodding her head now and then as a sign that she seized upon the most important points. When I had made an end of my story she remained silent and thoughtful for some time.

"Well, what do you think of it all?" I said at last. "Can you see any development of the enemy's attack?"

"I think I see the possibility of an attack which I had not quite contemplated," she replied, very thoughtfully.

"And that is—?"

"It is very clever," she said, still thoughtful and serious. "I wonder it did not occur to me. Certainly Fritz von Hofberg is a villain, but he is full of wisdom and of common sense, and he knows all the faults and littlenesses of men and women."

"I don't understand," I said. "Put all that into plain language, Nancy."

"Don't you see," she said, "that the best thing that could happen for the success of the Graf's plans would be an estrangement between Amirel and Sir Desmond?

If that could be brought about von Hofberg's prospects would be advanced considerably. Sir Desmond is, as the Graf rightly said, a proud man, lacking imagination and humor—if his mind could be poisoned against Amirel's companions and friends, or if his patrician pride could be offended, he would not be slow to show his resentment. Now Amirel is as proud as he—she is also, as you saw this morning, very impatient of control; and if Sir Desmond showed himself distant and haughty to her friends and champions, she would adopt a strong line of her own in their defense. He would not give way—neither would she. You may imagine the result."

"You mean that she would break off her engagement?"

"I mean that she is so high-spirited that she would not submit to the indignity of seeing her friends put aside as unfit for her. In spite of that highly amusing little scene this morning I am confident that she admires you all the more because of it, and that she believes you did everything out of real regard for her. Well, since she feels like that about it, what would she be likely to do if when Sir Desmond arrives he shows some disposition to resent your presence here? It's a case of 'Love me, love my dog,' my dear Cosmo."

"Um-m," I said, after I had allowed all this to filter through my brain. "It really means that von Hofberg is going to have a shot at poisoning the wells, eh?"

"Exactly. He will poison the wells—poison them in a polite, nice, scientific way, from afar off, and so cleverly that we shall not know what he is doing," she replied.

"But I don't understand why he should have shown me all his cards," I exclaimed. "It would surely have served him better to keep his projects to himself."

"There was the chance of winning you over," she replied. "Didn't he tell you that he always tried? He is a good tryer, Fritz von Hofberg. And he gave you no details, you know. Oh, I know him—he is full of tricks and subtleties."

"Well, what can we do?" I said. "Keep strict guard over the Princess and her jewels, I suppose? There doesn't seem anything else to do."

"I don't think either are in the slightest danger," said Nancy. "It is my belief that the next act of this drama won't be played until Sir Desmond arrives."

"And my duties will then be over," I said. "I shall look to you to give me my discharge at once, Nancy—you acted as recruiting sergeant."

"You will probably discharge yourself," she replied. "Judging by your high-handed proceedings of this morning you are not likely to ask anybody's permission to do this or that."

Then she went away to join the Princess, and for the rest of the afternoon I was left to myself. I passed the time in somewhat restless fashion, reading a little, smoking a great deal, knocking the balls about on the bil-

liard table, loafing in the courtyard, sitting in moody silence on the ramparts of the south tower. I grew morose and almost melancholy—everything seemed to be going wrong. I had offended the Princess, I had perhaps been of use to von Hofberg in forwarding his nefarious schemes, I appeared to be doing no good to anybody save to our enemies. I was sure that Sir Desmond Adare would be much displeased to find me in his house, and I was certain that all sorts of unpleasant complications would arise when he returned. I went on thinking these things until I worked up an unmistakable fit of the blues, with the consequences that I kept away from the tea-table and behaved at dinner as though all the sins of the world had suddenly been lumped upon my shoulders.

I had sufficient sense to remain in seclusion for the rest of the evening, but as I walked in the courtyard that night, smoking a melancholy cigar under the mellow moonlight which one only gets at midsummer, I heard a light step near me and turned to find the Princess advancing upon my solitude. She paused as she came within touch of me, and I saw that her face, half hidden in some floating web of lace, was anxious and troubled.

"Mr. Hanmer—" she began, rather diffidently, "you seem to be moody and troubled, and I am much afraid that I am the cause of it all."

The old mocking spirit welled up within me.

"Oh, dear me, no, Princess!" I replied. "Nothing of

the sort, I assure you. I am somewhat pensive—that's all. Influence of the weather, you know—there is a strain of melancholy in me which always responds to the moon."

I pointed to the full orb of Luna, sailing in tranquil majesty through a sky of deep blue. She glanced at it for a second and its light shone on her upturned face: then she turned to me.

"I am not to be put off in that way," she said, quietly. "Mr. Hanmer, I behaved very ungenerously, very rudely to you this morning—I am very, very sorry. Will you forgive me?" She stretched out her hand—both hands, I think. I also think that I took it—or them—in mine for a moment, but I am somewhat confused about the matter.

"And now," she said, "tell me—you are anxious, troubled, are you not? Please tell me what it is."

After a moment's rapid thought I spoke.

"Well, Princess, I am anxious," I said. "It is useless to deny it."

"Ah!" she said. "It is because of von Hofberg."

"I don't quite think it is," I replied. "He is certainly a dangerous person, but my anxiety does not altogether spring from the mere fact of his presence in the neighborhood. The real truth, Princess, lies here—I fear that instead of being a help I may be a hindrance to your happiness, that instead of proving a means of safety I may turn out a source of positive danger."

"Don't speak in riddles," she said. "Tell me what you mean."

"I mean that I am not the man who ought to be here," I replied. "You remember what I told you on the steamer that morning? Well—I have perhaps been singularly obtuse, but it has only recently occurred to me that Sir Desmond Adare has a well-founded right to object strongly to my presence here."

She stared at me half-incredulously for a moment: then—

"But I asked you to be here!" she exclaimed with genuine warmth. "I asked you—he cannot object to what I do."

"What you did, Princess, was done in ignorance," I replied. "You see, you women don't know men—at least, not very well, you know. And, of course, Sir Desmond's a man, and he'll look at the whole thing from a man's standpoint, and he would be quite justified in kicking me out for my impudence—"

"Oh, no, no!" she exclaimed.

"Ah, yes, yes!" I said. "Of course the whole thing was a big mistake to begin with—Nancy and I ought to have had more sense. Put it down to our hearts, Princess, not to our heads—we're both Irish and equally impulsive. The thing is—do I go or stay? I believe upon my honor, that you are safe here—I believe Deasy is sufficient guard. If I go I shall hang about in the neighborhood until I know you are quite safe and that my

services, whatever they may be worth, are really not needed any longer. But I am anxious that—that there should be no misunderstanding with Sir Desmond, you know, on my account—"

She came closer to me and laid her hand on my arm.

"Who suggested that there might be some misunderstanding?" she asked, quietly.

"Oh, er—it occurred to me, you know," I said, rather lamely.

"And I suppose it occurred to the Graf von Hofberg, too, eh?" she inquired.

"He certainly did mention it," I confessed.

She nodded her head two or three times; the point of her toe traced a pattern in the gravel: her eyes seemed to follow the lines.

"I wish to say, Mr. Hanmer," she said, lifting her face at last. "And I wish you to remember, too, that my trust in you is firmer than ever. I—I will be much more obedient in future than I was this morning."

Then, before I could speak, she gave me a nod and a smile, and went off so rapidly that ere I had recovered from my astonishment she had vanished. With her disappearance my doubts and fears disappeared also—I drew a long breath and looked up at the stars as if I would defy them and whatever malign influence they happened to possess. Come what might I would see the thing out—it was the first time for many a long year

that I had been actuated by so pure a desire to serve a fellow-creature faithfully and honestly, or had had so much confidence reposed in me—yes, come what might, I would see the thing out.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FATE OF THE BULL-DOG

THERE followed after that a fortnight of absolute and uneventful calm. The days went by, one after another, without the semblance of aught that could annoy or disturb. For a day or two after the visit of the Graf we lived in momentary expectation of an event: no event occurred. I think the Princess, who spent much of her time on the rampart of the south tower, gazing across the park and at the far-off hills, expected to see a beleaguering army advancing against us, but she was never vouchsafed the sight of even a militia-man. It seemed as though our enemy had decided to leave us in peace, but I knew quite well that he was perfecting his plans as he lay waiting in his trenches. Certainly we heard of him as engaged in very peaceful pursuits. It was easy to hear the gossip of the country-side, although we ourselves kept to the shelter of the Castle, and we had news of the Prince and the Graf almost every day. They appeared to have laid their titles aside in favor of less pretentious ones; they were now Counts with unpronounceable names, and they had come to the south-west of Ireland to do a little fishing,

to study the manners and customs of the natives, to lounge about a great deal, and to amuse themselves generally. We learnt that they were very popular at the hotel in Ennis, which they had selected as their head-quarters, that they were noble-minded and free-handed gentlemen, and that the dark one was particularly affable to everybody. Hearing all this we had no difficulty in concluding that the Graf von Hofberg intended to be as good as his word, and to prosecute his campaign with all that acumen and penetration for which he was so famous amongst folk who happened to be acquainted with him.

Apart from the fact that we were confined to the Castle, and had to satisfy our desire for outdoor life by excursions of circumscribed limit in the garden of the courtyard or on the ramparts of the tower, we spent our time rather pleasantly. I taught my companions to play billiards, and in response to an oft-repeated wish of the Princess that we should have some out-door amusement I procured a light cricket-bat and a quantity of tennis balls and devised a species of cricket in the courtyard, which afforded us plenty of exercise and not a little fun. Altogether those two weeks of peace passed away very pleasantly. We had books to read, games to play, we could take or remain silent, exactly as we pleased, and we were, after all, not so cribbed and cabined as one is on even a luxuriously fitted American liner.

We had two welcome breaks in the monotony of our

existence at that period in the shape of two visits from my artist friend, Mr. Paul Carburton. I have already said that on certain days visitors were admitted to Annalleen Castle. After consultation with Deasy I had decided that permission to inspect the Castle should be suspended for the present. On the next visitors' day following Deasy came to the billiard room, where I was instructing the Princess in the art of holding a cue, and said that there was a person at the gateway who wanted to see the Castle, and persisted in remarking that if I only knew he was there he would be forthwith admitted.

"What sort of person is he, Deasy?" I inquired.

Deasy shook his head in an undecided fashion.

"I couldn't quite say, sir," he replied. "His attire, sir, is remarkable."

"Ah!" I said, "I think I know him. It must be the artist man, Mr. Paul Carburton. He is painting a picture near here. I remember now that he said something about wanting to see the Castle. I think he is innocent enough."

"Oh, let the poor man in!" exclaimed the Princess. "An artist should have leave to pass anywhere, it is so necessary."

"If you will excuse me, Princess, I will go down to the gateway," I said; and I left her to practise the stroke, and went off with Deasy in my wake.

Mr. Paul Carburton was clinging to the ironwork of the massive gate, and peering through it pretty much as a monkey peers through the bars of its cage. Before I reached him I appreciated the force of Deasy's remark as to his attire. It was a blazing day, and Mr. Carburton had evidently determined to blaze in company with it. He wore a knickerbocker suit of white drill; his stockings were bright green; his shoes were newly pipe-clayed; his hat, a capacious matter with a brim as big as a small cart-wheel, was of perforated linen, stiffly starched, and decorated with a green ribbon; in his button-hole he wore a scarlet tulip; his necktie, very large and flowing, was of cerulean blue. In one hand he grasped his pipe, in the other a mighty umbrella, spotlessly white as to its exterior, verdantly green as to its lining.

When he caught sight of me Mr. Carburton lifted up his voice in the tones of expostulation.

"I say," he said, while I was still twenty yards away, "tell that man to let me in! This is the regular visitors' day, and I've walked out from Ennis, and given up an afternoon's work, to see this place. What's it locked up for, anyway, when all the guidebooks and everything tell you it's open to visitors?"

"There are reasons," I said, as I reached the gate. "And of course Sir Desmond Adare reserves the right to close the Castle whenever he pleases."

"Well, I want to come in," he said, discontentedly. "I shan't make any difference to whatever's going on—nobody'll notice me."

I thought it extremely likely that everybody would notice him, but I carefully refrained from saying so.

"I think you may admit Mr. Carburton," I said to Deasy, who forthwith opened the wicket gate and admitted the visitor in all his glory. He did not condescend to thank either of us; instead he walked straight through the gateway, stopped at the entrance to the courtyard, unfurled his umbrella, settled his spectacles, and looked about him. An irresistible temptation seized upon me—I was powerless to thrust it aside.

"If you will excuse me for one moment, Mr. Carburton," I said. "I will put away the work in which I was just now engaged and will show you round the Castle myself," and I went hastily back to the billiard-room, where Nancy had just joined the Princess. "If you care to see something uncommon and remarkable," I said, "go up to the gallery and look out into the courtyard. I am about to conduct Mr. Paul Carburton round the Castle."

"Who is Mr. Paul Carburton?" asked Nancy.

"A landscape painter," I replied, and ran back to the gateway. The little artist was still staring about him, occasionally putting a question to Deasy, who hovered in his rear, jingling his bunch of keys. These he presently resigned to me, himself retiring to his pantry, there no

doubt to chuckle over the odd apparition which he had just seen.

I conducted Mr. Carburton round the courtyard at a leisurely pace, so that the Princess and Nancy might have abundant opportunities of inspecting him; I showed him the garden, the stables, the south tower—which he utterly refused to climb—and the bull-dog, whom he regarded with fascination and horror. After that I led him over such parts of the Castle as were open to visitors. He took his own time in inspecting everything, and I was beginning to weary of my self-inflicted task when Deasy suddenly appeared before us.

"Tea is served in the garden, sir," he said, addressing me; "and the Princess begs that you will ask Mr. Carburton to drink a cup."

Mr. Carburton took off his spectacles and polished them with a meditative air.

"That's extremely thoughtful of the Princess," he said. "I don't think I ever wanted a cup of tea so badly in my life. I never knew such a place as Ireland—you can't get a drink anywhere without tramping about twenty miles for it. By-the-bye," he went on as Deasy retired, "who is the Princess?—at least, what Princess is it?"

"The Princess of Amavia," I replied shortly, not feeling exactly pleased at the turn which affairs were taking.

"Amavia? Oh, yes—that's one of those little played-out states, isn't it? I know it—I once travelled through

it. It's about as big as one of the home counties. I say, was that she that I saw you with on the boat? It was, eh?—well, she's a very handsome woman."

I felt more inclined to break Mr. Carburton's neck than to present him to the Princess, but I was obliged to obey her commands, so I marched him out of the Castle and across the courtyard. The Princess and Nancy received him with a cordiality which I very much resented, and all the more so because he appeared to accept it as his natural right. I never saw a man make himself at home so quickly, and with so little effort. He immediately took upon himself to assist the Princess at the tea-table, and when he had supplied Nancy with all she wanted he went to work at the task of making himself comfortable in a fashion which seemed to me to be absolutely impudent. Observing that he liked to sit in the shade he unscrewed the handle of his gigantic umbrella and drew out an elongation of it which terminated in a formidable spike. Unfurling the umbrella he planted the spike in the ground; under the miniature tent thus formed he placed a camp-stool. Then he secured a cup of tea and a plateful of bread-and-butter, and with the remark that cakes were bad and sweets worse he seated himself in his shelter and proceeded to drink the one and devour the other with the appetite of a schoolboy. As he ate and drank he talked, talked so much that it was scarcely possible for anyone else to get a word in. It was amazing to find how much the

man knew—he talked about music and pictures and books, of European capitals and American industrial centres, and of great names in art, politics, and science as if he were a walking encyclopedia. And all the time he talked he went on devouring bread-and-butter; plateful after plateful appeared and disappeared—devoured it as a child does, in a healthy hungry fashion. I think he drank six cups of tea—it seemed to me at any rate that he was never going to stop either eating or drinking. Finally he lighted his pipe, and after a moment's silence harked back to some remark which Nancy had made, and taking it as a text favored us with a long sermon on the esoteric significance of Wagner's music, every sentence of which was punctuated by a blast of tobacco.

I was glad to conduct Mr. Carburton to the gateway and to bid him farewell. I returned to the garden to find the Princess and Nancy lost in admiration of him.

"What a charming person!" exclaimed the Princess as I rejoined them.

"Awful bore!" I said, pettishly.

"He was most interesting," said Nancy. "You are piqued, Cosmo, because he talked so brilliantly."

"He covered an extraordinarily wide range of subjects, did he not?" said the Princess. "And his knowledge did not appear to be superficial, did it?"

"I don't think a man ought to know so much," I said. "Why shouldn't he confine himself to one subject. I thought his manner decidedly objectionable."

"Oh, no, I think not!" said the Princess. "I thought he was very nice. Of course, everybody expects eccentricity in the artist, or the poet, or the musician."

"My dear Princess," I said, "pray consider the man's extraordinary attire—even Deasy considered it remarkable."

"Do you know," she answered, "I thought it most sensible. After all, what are clothes for but to protect one from the cold in winter and the heat in summer? I quite admire Mr. Carburton for wearing such nice, cool, clean things."

"Oh!" I said. "I'm afraid I'm not a judge."

"I don't think you are, Mr. Hanmer," she replied. "I wonder if we might ask Mr. Carburton to dine—I am sure Desmond would if he were here."

"I am quite sure he would not!" I said with great emphasis. "I may not be a capable judge in some matters, Princess, but I am convinced of my absolute infallibility on that particular point."

"Are you?" she said, regarding me with an arch assumption of innocence. "Then—perhaps we may ask him to lunch?"

"I don't see why the man should be asked here at all," I said.

The Princess's fine eyebrows arched themselves; she turned the tide of conversation into another channel, and Mr. Paul Carburton was not mentioned again. As events proved, however, it was not at all necessary to

invite Mr. Carburton to visit the Castle; ere another week had passed by he came there on his own initiative. This time, the skies being somewhat dull, he wore his velvet coat, and the only point of color about him was the brilliant scarlet of his tie. As he brought with him a small portfolio of rare steel engravings for the delectation of the ladies, I was obliged to be very polite to him. He stayed to tea once more, and once more consumed vast quantities of bread-and-butter; once more, too, having inspired himself by drinking floods of tea, he favored us with a long sermon on the influence of natural surroundings on individual character, in the course of which he showed so deep a knowledge of human idiosyncrasies that the Princess and Nancy were fascinated. It was plain, indeed, that Mr. Paul Carburton was making an impression.

"That man," said the Princess, when he had taken his departure amidst wreaths of smoke from his own pipe, "is one of the most remarkable and interesting persons I have ever known. He is so child-like; his simplicity is charming."

"He told me," chimed in Nancy, "that he lives chiefly on bread, butter, vegetables, and fruit. That accounts for the marvellous clearness and lucidity of his ideas."

I went away, leaving them to praise Mr. Carburton to their hearts' content. I was somewhat sick of him, and I wished he would finish his picture and go back to London. Now that he had once gained a footing in the

Castle and won the women's favor I foresaw his perpetual presence there. He would come and yarn about all sorts of things which I did not understand, and which I was quite sure neither the Princess nor Nancy understood, and like all folk of his sort he would presume upon the kindness shown him. I wished heartily that I had not been so indulgent to him—if Sir Desmond Adare chanced to arrive and find him talking metaphysics to the Princess there would be unpleasantness all round, and I should be blamed.

But before Mr. Paul Carburton visited the Castle again certain events occurred which made the prospects of his doing so somewhat remote. Our period of incarceration had now extended to the twentieth day and we were in hourly expectation of hearing some news of Sir Desmond. On the twenty-second day—exactly three weeks after our arrival at Annalleen—the Princess received the expected message. Sir Desmond Adare had just reached Southampton and would travel homewards as quickly as possible. Within five minutes of the receipt of this telegram the whole Castle was in a species of uproar. I was commanded to ascertain from Bradshaw all the facts about Sir Desmond's journey, and when I finally announced that he would reach Ennis about three o'clock on the following afternoon everybody tumbled over everybody else in a frantic rush to complete preparations which were already as perfect as they possibly could be.

There was a great deal of confusion in the Castle that evening—the servants were running this way and that, and everybody was talking and laughing. Even the stable-boys and scullery-maids were going about with an extraordinary joy depicted on their faces—surely, I said, to myself, Sir Desmond can't be the cold, unimaginative man Nancy proclaims him to be if his menials are looking forward to his return with such zest and elation. Deasy, who was usually the pink of propriety, was quite juvenile and festive, and he became so preoccupied in discharging his duties at dinner that he offered the Princess salt instead of sugar and poured a quantity of sherry into a carafe of water under the impression that he was filling Nancy's glass.

But ere that evening was over Deasy received a shock which brought him to the full enjoyment of his senses. I was smoking a cigar in the billiard-room after dinner and wondering what would happen when the master of the Castle arrived, when Deasy appeared before me with a scared look on his face. I saw at once that something had happened.

"What is it, Deasy?" I asked.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "It's Peter. I was looking at him this afternoon and I thought he was not well then, but he's very bad now, sir. I'm afraid it's over with him."

"Over with him?" I exclaimed, jumping from my chair. "You don't mean that he's dying, Deasy?"

"Indeed, and I do then, sir," he answered with a sorrowful shake of the head. "I never saw a dog that looked more like it."

We went off together to Peter's kennel. It was already dusk, but one of the two or three men who were standing around held a lantern, and by its light I bent over the bull-dog and looked at him. He was lying outside his kennel, very quiet, stretched out in an easy attitude as if he had lain down to sleep, but it was easy to see that he was dying. Deasy knelt down by his head and spoke to him—there was a slight flicker of his eyelids, a shivering of his body, and Peter was dead. Deasy turned a white face in my direction.

"Holy Mother!" he said. "He's gone, sir."

The men standing round broke into low murmurs of grief—grief mixed with a good deal of superstitious dread.

" 'Tis strange the dog should die suddent like that—shure he was in good health this mornin'," said one.

"An' the masther comin' home an' all!" said another.

I bent down and looked at Peter more closely. There was no doubt about it—the poor dog was dead, and already beginning to stiffen. I turned to the men, begging them not to talk of Peter's death, lest the Princess should hear of it, and when he had had the body carefully locked up in an out-house I went back to the Castle with Deasy.

"That's a strange thing, Deasy," I said. "How old was Peter?"

"A matter of ten years, sir," replied Deasy. "Dear, dear—it will be sad news for Sir Desmond—he thought a power of the dog, he did."

"Deasy," I said "pack a lot of ice round Peter's body before you go to bed to-night, and when Sir Desmond arrives to-morrow ask him to order a post-mortem examination by a veterinary surgeon."

Deasy stared at me with eyes full of wonder.

"It seems to me," I said, "that Peter was poisoned."

Deasy groaned.

"And indeed I wouldn't wonder, sir," he said. "Dear—dear! 'Twill be a black day to-morrow after all."

The prophecy was made in all unconsciousness—but it was destined to become terribly true.

CHAPTER XV

THE BLACK DAY

WHEN I opened my eyes next morning it was with a conscious, miserable feeling that something was wrong. I felt heavy, dazed, horribly depressed—for a moment I wondered if I had relapsed to my former bad habit during the previous evening and had drunk more than was good for me. I had to make a violent effort before I could recall the events of the day; it was only by a supreme endeavor that I remembered that all that I had taken in the way of alcohol was one glass of claret at luncheon and two glasses at dinner.

But my head!—it felt as if I had drunk a lot of champagne and a good deal of whiskey afterwards, and my mouth was dry, parched and unpleasant. I glanced at the clock on my mantel-piece; it was already a quarter-past-eight, and I usually woke at half-past-six. I wanted to rise at once, at least, one-half of me did, but the other half showed a remarkable desire to remain in bed, and that half won the fight—I sank back again on my pillow and I believe I went straight off to sleep—a heavy,

unnatural sleep in which some part of my brain seemed to refuse to share.

I became conscious after a time that there was a great noise going on—had been going on for a long time. I had no interest in that noise—or, at any rate, all that I had was a sort of languid curiosity as to how long it would last. But as I became more fully conscious I was aware that the noise was a reiterated pounding at the door of my chamber and that someone was vociferating my name in very anxious and terrified tones. Even then, when I was quite conscious of this, I remained supine between the sheets for quite two minutes and I believe I felt a sort of malicious pleasure in thinking about the perturbation of whoever it was that knocked. In fact I felt for all the world like a man who has been very drunk at midnight and who has not slept away the effects of his debauch when he wakes next morning. I was in the humor for all sorts of apish tricks.

I got out of bed at last, slipped into a dressing-gown and opened the door. There was a pretty mob!—housekeeper, footman. Nancy's demure maid, the coachman, and a page-boy with his mouth wide open. When they saw me they fell back—I stood staring at them while they slowly recovered their breath and their manners.

"Well?" I said.

The housekeeper, stilling her palpitations by the pressure of a fat hand on a capacious bosom, found breath first.

"Oh, sir!" she said. "I am glad to see you; we couldn't think why you didn't open the door—indeed Dennis has been knocking at it this ten minutes."

"Well?" I said again.

"We're afraid there's something the matter, sir, Deasy—"

The name shot me out of my lethargy like a plunge into a tub of ice-cold water.

"We can't get him to open his door, sir. He usually appears about half-past-seven, and now it's half-past-nine. There's Dennis there has shouted himself black in the face, but never a word has Deasy replied to him."

"An' the door is that strong," said Dennis, "shure I wouldn't be able to open it unless I used a crowbar."

"Do the ladies know of this?" I asked.

"Indeed an' they do, sir. They are in the breakfast-room at this blessed minute in a state of high flusthration."

"Go down and tell them not to be alarmed. I will be there in a moment."

I shut the door on them, tore off my things, plunged into the cold tub ready laid out for me, and in three minutes felt something—only something—like my real self. Then I literally jumped into my clothes or such of them as were strictly necessary and rushed downstairs to the door of Deasy's pantry.

All the household and all the denizens of the stable and courtyard appeared to have gathered together there.

I bundled them off, right and left, with the exception of the coachman, the footman, and the gardener, who were elderly men and likely to work without loud-voiced ejaculations as to what it all meant.

"You have not been able to make him hear?" I said. "And you can't open the door?"

"Indeed, then, we can do neither, sir," answered the coachman. "There's never a sound come out of the room since I was called to it."

"Then there is nothing for it but to break open the door," I said. "Get a light crowbar or something of that sort quickly."

The gardener hurried away, saying that he knew of a tool that would do, and I went off to the breakfast-room, where I found the Princess and Nancy in a state of astonishment in which there was a considerable mixture of uneasiness.

"What is all this, Mr. Hanmer?" asked the Princess. "Is it true that they cannot rouse Deasy and that they had great difficulty in rousing you?"

"I'm afraid it is, Princess," I replied. "However, here I am, all right, you see; and we will soon know what is the matter with Deasy. Don't be alarmed—I daresay there is some natural cause for this rather strange incident."

She looked at me with questioning eyes. Nancy drew nearer and spoke with insistence:

"Cosmo, is is true that the bull-dog died last night

and that his death seemed to be due to poisoning? Is it?" she asked.

"Yes, it's true he is dead," I answered, seeing that it was useless to conceal the truth. "As to the cause, I can't say what it was. I certainly think he was poisoned. And I am quite certain that I was drugged last night."

"Drugged?"

"Yes, drugged. I expect to find that Deasy has been drugged, too, when we break into his room," I said. "But it is useless to be frightened about it—we must try to face the whole thing bravely. Now, will you remain here until I return?—I will bring you news as quickly as possible."

"Stay, Mr. Hanmer!" said the Princess. "Do you believe that some one has been at work during the night —some enemy, I mean?"

"I am certain that I was drugged last night as I am that I see you, Princess," I replied. "But how it was done, or why, I don't know. I must go—please remain here until I return."

I went back to the men—the gardener had just returned, carrying a light bar of strong steel; the coachman and the footman looked from it to me with countenances full of fear and anxiety; I motioned to them to get to work at once.

The door burst open at last with a slow grinding of riven wood, and the men hung back on the threshold. I pushed them aside and walked in; there was only a

faint light in the room, but it was enough to show me the figure of Deasy, lying perfectly motionless on the camp-bed which stood in a recess. I beckoned the three men to follow: they stole after me on tiptoe, each man drawing his breath hard.

I thought at first that Deasy was dead, so rigid and quiet was the form outlined by the bed-clothes, but when I drew close to him I saw that he was sleeping very heavily, if he was not absolutely unconscious. He lay on his back, his hands clasped across his chest; by bending down it was just possible to catch the sound of his breathing. There was no sign of pain or of illness in his face, save that his brows were drawn together in a slight frown. I laid my hand on his shoulder and shook him gently: you might as well have shaken a log of wood or tried to wake the Sphinx to life by stroking it.

The men stared at their fellow-servant as if he were something uncanny; the footman muttered a pious supplication and crossed himself. I turned from Deasy to them.

"Now, men," I said, "I want you to look round this room carefully, to notice everything in it. Dennis, draw up the blind and open the window—that's better. Now, then, use your eyes and see if there is anything that seems unusual."

But there was nothing unusual—I had noticed that as soon as I had stepped into the room. Deasy was a model of neatness and tidiness at all times—the habits

of the punctilious old soldier were strong within him. Everything in the room was in its place; the clothes which he had taken off on retiring to bed were neatly folded on a chair by the bed-side—even his socks were laid out with mathematical precision on the top of his more important garments, and his shoes were placed side by side beneath the chair. On the table in the centre of the room stood two tall silver candlesticks, with about half a candle in each; a small decanter, in which a little whiskey still remained; an empty glass; a lead tobacco jar; a pipe, resting in an ash tray; a copy of "Punch" for the previous week, and the third volume of Bohn's edition of Coxe's Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough, open at pages 208–9, across which lay a pair of spectacles. Everything pointed to the fact that Deasy, having finished his day's labors, had taken a little well-earned recreation with pipe, glass, and book, and had then retired to his bed.

It was quite evident that the men saw nothing that struck them as unusual. They looked this way and that, sweeping the table with a careless glance, as if they had seen the same thing so often as to regard it as commonplace. Each man shook his head.

"I suppose Deasy always smoked his pipe and had his glass before going to bed?" I said, looking at the coachman, as the eldest and most responsible of the three.

"Indeed, then, he did, sir," he answered, readily enough. "It was his custom to smoke two pipes, and

have his two glasses of whiskey and to read a bit out of his book. Many's the time I've seen him employed in that way. That little decanter was what he measured his drink in, two glasses every night, neither more nor less, 'twas all he'd taste one day or the other."

"He seems to have followed his usual custom last night," I said. "Men—Deasy has been drugged. This is no natural sleep. He is under the influence of some heavy opiate. I firmly believe, in fact I am certain, that I too was drugged: you remember what difficulty you had in waking me? There has been foul play in the house during the night."

They uttered exclamations of horror and surprise, staring from me to Deasy, and from Deasy to each other with eyes full of incredulous wonder.

"Now, then," I went on, "we must act quickly. One of you must fetch a doctor and a police inspector at once, and get both here as soon as ever you can. The other two must remain here until they come."

It was decided that the coachman should go, and he left the room immediately, promising to bring back doctor and policeman within the hour. I bade the other two sit down, and I took a seat myself by the bedside, watching Deasy and at the same time trying to form some notion of what had happened. I had now no doubt whatever that some crime had been committed during the night, and that Deasy and I had been drugged in order that the criminal might do his work undisturbed,

but I had no notion yet as to what crime it was. I began to think about the means employed to drug us both, and to wonder how it was that the opiate had not acted upon me with such force as it appeared to be exerting upon Deasy. And suddenly I remembered something that had happened the previous night, and a suspicion of the truth flashed into my brain. When I first arrived at the Castle I was suffering from sleeplessness, and had complained of it frequently to Nancy. She had advised me to drink a glass of hot water on going to bed every night, and I had been steadily practising the use of this simple remedy for nearly three weeks. I invariably retired to my room at eleven o'clock; by Deasy's orders a glass of hot water always awaited me there. I remembered now that on the previous evening I had found the water almost boiling hot, and had poured at least half, if not more, of it out, afterwards filling up the glass with cold water from the carafe on my washstand. Without a doubt that water had been drugged, and so, I felt sure, had Deasy's modest allowance of whiskey. He had drunk almost the whole of the draught prepared for him; I had thrown at least half of mine away. I did not wonder now that he remained so utterly oblivious of everything around him for so long a time. My own head was still heavy and aching from the effects of the opiate, in spite of the excitement and the sudden shock that had partly sobered me.

Whose hand was it that had administered that drug?

It must have been the hand of some person living in the Castle, for after ten o'clock in the evening it was an absolute impossibility for anyone to enter or leave the place. Without doubt we had a traitor in the camp, a traitor in the pay of von Hofberg, to whom I unhesitatingly attributed the inception of the crime. Who could that traitor be? I racked my brains in a useless effort to think of a likely person, the only result of all my thought was a firmer belief in my theory that the Graf had commenced operations in skillful and effective fashion.

Within a few minutes over the hour the coachman was back again with a doctor and an inspector of police. He brought them straight to Deasy's room, and I closed the door upon the six of us while I briefly recounted the events of the morning to the new-comers. Both listened silently and attentively; when I had made an end the doctor went over to the bed and looked carefully at Deasy.

"There is no doubt the man has been heavily drugged," he said, presently. "What drug has been used I can't pretend to say. He's in no danger; he'll sleep the effects away. I'll seal up that whiskey decanter and glass, and hand them over to you, inspector. We may find out what's been used by analysis. You might let me have the glass you drank your hot water from last night, Mr. Hanmer; there may be some trace of the drug still remaining about it."

I sent Dennis for the glass, and when he returned the doctor sealed everything up and handed the box in which he packed the various vessels to the Inspector. The latter seemed undecided as to what was to be done next. He looked at me questioningly.

"Yes," I said, "there is a good deal to be done yet, inspector. It is quite evident that this man and myself were drugged for some purpose. I believe that purpose to have been robbery. In the strong room there"—I pointed to the door—"a large number of valuables were secured, amongst them a case full of jewels belonging to the Princess of Amavia, who is a guest at the Castle. Since we burst open the door of this room we have not touched that of the strong room. I should like you to examine it and to see if there are any signs of its having been tampered with."

The inspector walked across and tried the door of the strong room.

"It's locked, sir," he said. "It seems all right."

I turned to the three servants.

"Does anyone know where Deasy keeps his keys?" I asked.

"Indeed, then, I do, sir," answered the footman. "He always slept with them under his pillow."

The inspector advanced to the bedside and slipped his hand beneath the pillow. "They're here," he said, and drew the keys out.

It took some little time to find the key of the strong

room, but we got the door open at last, and, Dennis providing some lighted candles, we entered. At my wish the inspector tried the door of the safe in which the Princess had deposited her satchel: it was safely locked.

"That seems all right, sir," said the inspector, rattling the handle.

"Wait a moment," I said. "The Princess of Amavia has the key of this safe. I will ask her to open it."

I went off to the breakfast-room, where the Princess and Nancy were awaiting my coming with evident concern and impatience. As briefly as possible I told them of the events which had happened since I had left them, and of my fears for the safety of the jewels. I begged the Princess to come with me to open the safe. To this she readily consented: we all three proceeded to the strong room.

"Princess," I said, as the men made way for us to approach the safe, "you placed the satchel containing your jewels in this safe with your own hands in the presence of Deasy and myself, and the key has never left your possession since?"

"Certainly," she answered, looking round the ring of faces. "I locked the door myself, and the key has never been out of my keeping."

"Please open the safe," I said.

She produced the key from her pocket and fitted it to the lock. The door swung open—there lay the

satchel, exactly where the Princess had placed it. A sigh of relief broke from more than one of the party.

"Please examine the satchel, Princess," I said.

She drew it out . . . a sudden, sharp exclamation burst from her lips.

"The lock is broken!" she gasped. "Oh! the jewels are gone—see, the satchel is empty!"

I had expected it all along—at any rate since I had come to the conclusion that Deasy and I had been drugged for a purpose. We had been outwitted; some one with brains cleverer than ours had so far outplayed us at every point of the game.

We held a hurried consultation as to what was to be done. It was possible that other valuables had been stolen; as no one but Deasy knew what had been secured in the strong room it was useless to attempt to gauge the extent of the robbery until he recovered. By the advice of the inspector the safe and strong room were locked up again; the doctor proceeded to minister to Deasy; and a mounted messenger was despatched to the nearest resident magistrate and to some superior police official. And as the famous Amavia amethyst had disappeared a message was also sent to the Prince of Amavia from the Princess, formally acquainting him of the fact and of the chief details known so far, and requesting his presence at the Castle. For the amethyst was a crown jewel, and its loss was of the greatest moment and importance.

About two o'clock in the afternoon the Prince arrived at the Castle. I went out into the courtyard to receive him. He brought with him two companions—one of them the Graf von Hofberg, the other my old orderly, the meek-faced, flashily-dressed Samuel Jefferson.

CHAPTER XVI

ACCUSED

THE presence of Samuel Jefferson affected me pretty much as a superstitious old woman is affected by the sudden appearance of a magpie. My first instinct was to stop, stare, and wonder; by a great effort I suppressed it, and stepped forward to meet the Prince of Amavia and the Graf von Hofberg, without, I think, betraying any knowledge of their companion. But however admirably I may have feigned ignorance and indifference, I was very far from feeling comfortable, and an itching inquisitiveness, not unmingled with fear of approaching trouble, began to make itself unpleasantly active on the fine skin of my mental consciousness. The appearance of Samuel Jefferson must needs be unpleasant at any time; it was doubly so when taken in conjunction with the circumstances in which it was now made.

But there were further disquieting occurrences to follow. As representative of the Princess I moved forward to receive her brother with the respect and attention due to his rank. The Graf advanced first; remembering the pleasant fashion in which our previous meeting had ter-

minated, I prepared to greet him with politeness, though I had no doubt whatever that in him I beheld the real instigator of the outrage on Deasy and the robbery of the Princess's jewels. To my utter astonishment he met my advance with an extremely distant bow, and immediately turned away to address some remark to the Prince. The latter, favoring me with a supercilious stare, passed onwards towards the door of the Castle, the Graf walking at his side, and Samuel Jefferson following meekly in the rear. All this time the *çi-devant* orderly had never shown the least recognition of me; his attitude was that of a smug ecclesiastic, mouthing some unctuous phrase, and it was accentuated all the more by the flashiness of his clothes. He looked neither to the right nor to the left as he passed me, and I could not help thinking that he would look pretty much as he did if he were walking across a little stretch of flagged corridor, with a chaplain at his side, the hangman in his rear, and the fitting end of beam, rope, and trap-door immediately before him.

The three men walked up to the door of the stone hall; before the Graf could raise his hand to the bell I had recovered my self-possession. With two or three hasty strides I pushed past them and turned to confront them on the threshold.

"We will pass by your studied insult to me just now, Graf," I said; "but you will not enter this house save by my permission. As representative of the Princess Amirel

of Amavia, I am here to receive His Highness the Prince, her brother, with every respect; I am not yet cognizant of the Prince's presence."

"His Highness the Prince of Amavia is not accustomed to such receptions, Mr. Hanmer," replied von Hofberg; "and we might be disposed to question your right to pose as the Princess's representative. However, you are in the presence of His Highness, and he will be pleased to be conducted to the Princess at once. As she sent for her brother, Mr. Hanmer, she may not be pleased to know that he was kept bandying personalities at the door with a menial."

"We'll let that pass, too, Graf," I said. "I'll answer to the Princess for anything I do. But who is the other man? He bears a striking resemblance to an old orderly of mine, and though he is no doubt a very fitting companion for princes and lords, I'm not sure that his company will be welcomed in an Irish gentleman's house."

At this Prince Adalbert uttered a fiery exclamation, and for a second I saw an unpleasant gleam in the Graf's eyes. As for Jefferson, he assumed a still more sanctimonious expression, and his pose deepened in its suggestion of humility. He sighed deeply, but made no comment on my remarks.

"The other man," answered the Graf, "is Mr. Jefferson, who is known to fame, Mr. Hanmer, as one of your most successful private inquiry agents. Mr. Jefferson is in the employ of His Highness the Prince of Amavia,

and as he carries in his breast some important secrets relating to this affair, he is a very interesting personage, whom the Princess will like to meet."

"The Princess shall decide that for herself," I said. "I shall trouble you to remain in the hall until she is informed of your presence. And, gentlemen," I continued, approaching the Prince and Graf more closely and looking from one to the other, "let me give you a word of warning. Annoy the Princess in any way whatever, or fail in your duty to those about her, and, by heaven! you shall both be thrown out of that gateway, and your rascally spy horsewhipped after you. Do you hear, that, Prince? Then keep your ruffians in order."

They stared at me as if they scarcely credited their senses. I motioned them into the stone hall and waved my hand towards the further end.

"You will understand that you are here on sufferance," I said, "and therefore you will remain there until the Princess makes known her pleasure. Bluster as much as you like, Prince," I continued, as His Highness began to complain. "We are in the United Kingdom here, where every man's house is his castle, and I'll trouble you to comport yourself with obedience and dignity."

"You shall suffer for this," said von Hofberg. "You shall suffer!"

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, Graf," I said, and went away. There was bitter trouble ahead—I was cer-

tain of that, and my feelings were getting a little too much for me. I was already experiencing a violent desire to fight von Hofberg and to thrash Jefferson—as for the Prince, it was easy to see that he possessed very little in the way of intellect or strength of character. His chief occupation seemed to be to blow out his cheeks and twirl his bristling moustaches and to relieve himself of fiery expletives. There would be little trouble with him—but von Hofberg was dangerous.

I repaired hurriedly to the Princess and gave her a brief account of how matters stood, not forgetting the presence of Samuel Jefferson.

"What do you conclude?" she said, when I had finished.

"That von Hofberg intends to play his big card today," I said. "He doubtless knows quite well that Sir Desmond is now on his way here and will arrive this very afternoon. In my opinion he has carried out this robbery with full intent to use it as a weapon in the cause which he is fighting—and I confess, Princess, that I don't see his game at all, yet."

"You assume, then, that he is the thief?" she said, with some signs of hesitation and perplexity in her voice.

"Assume? I am certain of it! Who else is there that we can connect with the circumstances? We know," I said, "that the Graf had intentions upon the jewels—you yourself have expressed your positive opinion upon

that point—well, the jewels are gone! The fact is, Princess, we have been the victims of an elaborate conspiracy, and the author of it awaits your presence."

"And I suppose we must hold parley with him," she said, with a sigh of distaste. "Well, Desmond will be here in a little while."

I went back to the stone hall with that last sentence ringing in my ears. It was always Desmond, Desmond with her—as if the arrival of her lover would put an end to every difficulty. Well—it was only right that she should possess so much confidence in him, but I had my doubts as to whether his coming would work such marvellous results. One thing it would do, however; it would relieve me of the responsibility which I had of late found very grievous to bear.

I made a formal request to the Prince of Amavia to follow me, and preceded him and his companions to the apartment where I had left the Princess. When I opened the door I found that she had taken her seat at the head of a long table which filled the centre space of the floor; on her right hand sat Nancy Flynn; on the left stood an empty chair. Two more empty chairs stood at the other end of the table—it was evident that during my brief absence the Princess had indulged her love of dramatic effect and had arranged the *mise-en-scène* of the coming episode. As we entered she rose and bowed —the Prince gave her a curt nod; the Graf swept himself half-way to the ground.

The Princess remained standing—her eyes fixed on the meek figure of Mr. Jefferson.

"Who is that man?" she asked, pointing a finger towards him.

The Graf spoke.

"A private inquiry agent, Princess, whom we believe capable of giving us considerable help and information."

"Let him wait without. This is a private matter—I will have no strangers present."

"In that case," said the Graf, "objection may be taken to the presence of Mr. Hanmer."

"Mr. Hanmer is my good and trusted friend," she said. "Order that man to leave the room."

The Graf muttered a word or two to Jefferson, and that worthy person went out. I thought I caught a gleam of malice in his narrow-slitted eyes as he stole past me—then I closed the door on him.

The Princess was still standing. She pointed to the two chairs.

"You may sit there," she said. "Mr. Hanmer, please take this chair on my left."

We all sat down: for a moment there was a dead silence. The Prince, puffing out his cheeks and twisting his moustaches, stared at Nancy Flynn as though he cherished deliberate intentions of eating her; von Hofberg, very impassive, regarded the Princess with an attentive air. The Princess spoke, lifting her eyes from the

fancy work which lay before her and fixing them with a steady gaze upon her brother, who, encountering her glance, appeared to become exceedingly uncomfortable, and went through his puffing and twisting exercises with greater vigor than ever.

"Adalbert," she said, "I have sent for you in order to tell you that the amethyst which is one of the most treasured heirlooms of our family has been stolen from me, and that with it have disappeared my jewels—the value of which you know as well as I do. I am not going to recall the circumstances under which I left Amavia—it is sufficient to say that I am now entirely free of your influence and power, and that I shall never submit myself to either again. Let that pass, and let us come to the question—my jewels were in safe keeping here—during the past night they have been abstracted. As you and your friend the Graf von Hofberg followed me to this refuge I desire to ask you a plain question—do you know anything of this crime?"

The Prince's facial exercises became more and more violent, and I thought he would pluck out his moustache. He turned to the Graf, and with a great effort jerked out the words:

"Answer her!"

"With your permission, Princess," said the Graf, "I would point out that such a question is scarcely seemly. It is impossible that His Highness the Prince of Amavia could know anything of this robbery."

"While the Graf von Hofberg is the Prince of Amavia's only counsellor, friend, and confidant," said the Princess, with a very meaning intonation, "nothing evil is impossible to the Prince. It is useless to bandy compliments and courtesies, Graf von Hofberg; you are my enemy, and I am yours. We are at war, and I will fight you to the end—so let us speak plain truth to each other."

"You treat me very harshly, Princess," he answered, somewhat browbeaten. "I am not your enemy, but the sincere friend of Amavia and of yourself. But let us have the plain truth by all means. Do I gather that my prince and I are accused of complicity in or the instigation of this crime?"

"I honestly believe you to be at the root of the whole matter," said the Princess, with a charming frankness.

The Graf bowed: the Prince puffed out his cheeks until his eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets.

"I wish with all my heart that I knew where the Amavia amethyst is at this moment," said von Hofberg. "Permit me to point out, Princess, that your proprietorship of that very ancient and historic jewel has certain limitations, and that by the ancient law of the principality you are precluded from removing it outside the domains of your sovereign without his consent. Your recent clandestine flight—"

"Really, Graf, you may spare all your fine speeches!" she exclaimed. "I am free of Amavia, and nothing will

ever induce me to return to my brother's dominions. I did not send for my brother—who seems more than usually unintelligent this morning—in order to hear anything of pains and penalties: I wish to know if it is his desire to co-operate with me in endeavoring to recover the amethyst. Adalbert—I am talking to you."

The Prince appeared to find this direct invitation to take part in the proceedings very unwelcome to himself. He puffed and twisted, glared a good deal at Nancy and myself, looked despairingly at von Hofberg, and then delivered himself of a few words, of which I could make nothing out save some reference to his sister's undutiful behavior, her wilfulness in losing the amethyst, and his desire to punish somebody. As he finished the Graf strode nimbly into the arena.

"Yes, to punish somebody is His Highness's legitimate desire," he said. "There can be no doubt that the amethyst and jewels were stolen last night by an expert thief. We must find that thief and punish him—but it is much more important, Princess, that the stolen property should be recovered. Has Your Highness any definite suspicion as to the identity of the thief?"

"I have already said that I believe you to be at the root of the matter, Graf von Hofberg," said the Princess.

"I regret—for some reasons—that Your Highness is not correct in your suspicions," he said, rather sneeringly, and with, I thought, some sense of irritation. "It

has, perhaps, not occurred to Your Highness that the actual thief is much more in touch with Your Highness's person than Fritz von Hofberg has been ever privileged to be?"

The sneer was unmistakable. Moved by a common impulse the Princess and myself sprang to our feet at the same moment.

"Your meaning, Graf von Hofberg!" she exclaimed. "Your meaning!"

"I mean that I accuse that man, the cashiered and disgraced officer, whom you admitted, a perfect stranger, to your confidence, of having taken advantage of that confidence," he said, coolly. "If you wish to see the thief, Princess Amirel, he stands at your side—where Sir Desmond Adare will doubtless be pleased to find him."

There was a second or two of the strangest silence I have ever known: then a sharp exclamation burst from me, and I think I took a step in von Hofberg's direction. I felt the blood surge to my head; a red light seemed to dance before my eyes—then I was conscious that the Princess had seized me by the arm, and that von Hofberg had sprung to his feet and assumed a watchful attitude. The tension suddenly grew less relaxed, and passed away: I burst into laughter. I think the Princess believed I had gone mad—her grasp of my arm tightened. I went on laughing, and as I laughed I tried to disengage myself from her hands. It was in the midst of

this scene, to the sound of my laughter and the pleadings of the two frightened women, that the door suddenly opened and a tall man, somewhat haggard and travel-stained, appeared on the threshold. The Princess's fingers grew slack on my arm—their detaining pressure ceased altogether as with a sudden cry of "Desmond!" she sprang to meet her lover.

CHAPTER XVII

LOVE ME, LOVE MY DOG

FREE of the Princess's restraining arm I turned my back on the rest of them and walking over to the window, looked out into the park. I had no mind to witness more of the meeting between the lovers, and I wanted to regain my composure before the next business —of whatever nature it might be—came on the scene. I made a rapid calculation of how things stood—here was Sir Desmond Adare home again at the very moment in which I was accused of stealing the Princess's jewels. It seemed to me that von Hofberg had timed his accusation to a nicety—no stage manager could have worked the trick better. Well—and what was he going to follow that stroke with? Had the presence of the meek-faced Samuel, waiting impatiently in seeming patience outside in the corridor, anything to do with the charge against me? I had little doubt of that—I had been playing old woman to Samuel's magpie ever since I set eyes on him in the courtyard.

I turned round presently. With his hand still holding the Princess's Sir Desmond was crossing the room to Nancy Flynn. I looked him over as he smilingly shook

hands with her: he was a tall, distinguished man, patrician to the finger tips, with a rather handsome face, which would have been pleasanter if there had been more sympathy in his eyes. He was much bronzed and looked rather spare: his close-cropped head and well-brushed moustache suggested the soldier; and there was a quickness and precision in his movements which denoted the man of action. He gave me the impression of intelligence rather than of cleverness; of determination rather than of tact; I summed him up as the man who would lead a charge or go through a battle with resolute perseverance, carrying all before him by sheer obstinacy and disregard of aught that opposed him, but who had no genius for diplomacy or natural liking for verbal quibbles.

From Nancy Sir Desmond turned to me with a questioning look. The Princess, whose face was filled with happiness, appeared to draw him a little in my direction.

"Desmond," she said, "this is Mr. Hanmer, of whom I have already told you, and who has protected us from annoyance, and been most kind to us in every way. You will thank him later on."

He looked me up and down: I saw the expression of his face change. He responded to my own somewhat curt bow with a mere nod.

"I will thank Mr. Hanmer later on," he said, and turned away. He looked towards the other end of the room, where the Prince of Amavia and the Graf von

Hofberg stood watching him. "Is it by your desire that your brother and his friend are here?" he asked of the Princess, after he had stared at them in silence for a while. "It seemed to me that my entrance interrupted some sort of scene."

"Oh!" she said. "How am I to tell you everything? It is all so confusing! Mr. Hanmer, will you tell Sir Desmond Adare all about this matter?"

"If I may be permitted," began the Graf. "I would suggest—"

"Silence, sir!" said Sir Desmond. He turned to me. "Be good enough to accede to Her Highness's request, Mr. Hanmer," he said.

I resented his tone and the way in which he looked at me, but I came forward and gave my account of all that had happened as regards the safe disposal of the jewels from the day on which the Princess had deposited them in the safe until the moment of his arrival. He never took his eyes from my face all the time I was speaking, and it seemed to me that he made mental notes of such incidents as the death of the dog, the appearance of Deasy's room, and so on.

"Finally," I concluded, "at the moment of your arrival the Graf von Hofberg accuses me of stealing the jewels. I think you are now in full possession of the facts —I have told all I know."

He looked round him—he had seated himself at the head of the table, with the Princess at his right hand—

and it seemed to me that he assumed something of a judicial air.

"I am a magistrate," he said. "I think I shall do no wrong if I hear all that is to be said on this point. At present, Graf von Hofberg, you accuse Mr. Hanmer of stealing these jewels—may I ask on what grounds?"

The Graf hesitated a second or two and seemed to be lost in thought. At last he lifted his head and looked at Sir Desmond.

"If I speak, Sir Desmond Adare," he said, "it is because I desire to serve the Princess Amirel and to recover the amethyst, which is one of the most famous heirlooms of her house. I accuse that man, Mr. Meredith Cosmo Gordon Hanmer, of stealing the amethyst and the jewels —yes. In order to tell you why I bring this accusation against him I shall have to recall certain circumstances. About four weeks ago the Princess Amirel of Amavia left her brother's court and repaired to London. She was tracked by my agents to the house of the opera singer Miss Selma St. Clair, whose real name is Nancy Flynn. On the evening of the day following the arrival of the Princess at Miss St. Clair's apartments she left London in the company of that lady and of Mr. Hanmer. It became necessary, not merely on the Princess's own personal account but because she was travelling with valuable property, including the Amavia amethyst, in her possession, to find out all that was possible about her companions. With Miss St. Clair's history we were al-

ready acquainted: it did not cause us very much trouble to acquaint ourselves with the chief facts and events of Mr. Hanmer's career. Permit me to give you a brief résumé of those facts and events. Mr. Hanmer—"

The Princess interrupted the smooth flow of the Graf's eloquence with an exclamation of indignant contempt.

"Desmond! I appeal to you to put an end to this. There is nothing of Mr. Hanmer's career with which I am not already acquainted from his own lips. He has told me everything, and I have all the more trust in him because of his confidence in me," she said, warmly.

She meant well, poor Princess, but it was an unfortunate speech. I saw a look of distaste creep over Sir Desmond's face: the Graf, cool hand as he was, could scarcely repress a smile of triumph.

"I think I must hear the Graf von Hofberg," said Sir Desmond, rather icily. "Mr. Hanmer will have a right of reply. But it would give me much relief if you and Miss St. Clair would retire—I do not think this can be agreeable to you."

The Princess settled herself in her chair—she had looked something more than surprised when Sir Desmond decided against her, and she now gave him a glance which had a spice of defiance in it.

"I shall not retire," she said. "It is my property which is concerned. I shall hear everything, and perhaps I shall have something to say myself."

Sir Desmond bit his lips, but he said nothing, and he motioned the Graf to proceed.

"I have no wish to wound the feelings of either the Princess or her friend Mr. Hanmer," continued von Hofberg, coupling our names together in a fashion that made Sir Desmond wince. "But I shall give you the truth. Mr. Hanmer is an ex-officer of the British army, and he holds a peculiarly bad record. He was dismissed from the service a few years ago in consequence of an apparently inconquerable devotion to gambling and an incurable habit of intoxication. Since then he has rapidly fallen in the social scale. Indeed, he had sunk so low that on the morning of the day on which he first met the Princess Amirel he was turned out of his lodgings because he had not the wherewithal to pay the trifling sum due to his landlady."

The Princess's face was a study of conflicting emotions: indignation, contempt, anger blended with surprise that her lover should permit this pleasant pillorying of another man.

"This is shameful—it is vile!" she said. "Desmond —you permit this?"

He turned to her with a curious smile on his face.

"One must occasionally listen to unpleasant things against one's will," he said, with what seemed to me some significance of meaning. "The question which remains is for Mr. Hanmer to answer."

He turned to me. I knew from the expression of his face that von Hofberg had anticipated matters with great accuracy of perception: Sir Desmond Adare was not pleased to find me in his house.

"So far as I have given attention to the Graf von Hofberg," I said, carelessly, perhaps a little cynically, "I believe he has given the facts of my career very correctly. It is quite true that I was cashiered from the army because I was a gambler and a drunkard; it is quite true that I was almost penniless when I undertook this service on behalf of the Princess. It is also quite true that the Princess knew all these things very soon after we set out for Ireland, and that Miss St. Clair knew them before."

I saw Sir Desmond's face flush a little; it was only his sense of politeness that prevented him from betraying his annoyance. He turned to the Graf.

"Proceed," he said. "You have established your charges of a bad record against Mr. Hanmer, but that does not establish your more serious charge, that he has possessed himself of the Princess's jewels."

"I will now deal with that," said the Graf. "According to the testimony of the Princess and of Mr. Hanmer himself, he, the Princess, and the major-domo, or the butler, were the only persons who knew where the jewels were secured. Mr. Hanmer knew all the ways of the house—he knew that the strong room was guarded by

a bull-dog and by the butler. Last night the bull-dog dies from poison—this morning the butler is found suffering from the effects of some powerful narcotic, and the safe has been rifled of its contents. Upon whom should the natural suspicion be cast but upon the needy adventurer, who, by the foolishness of Miss Nancy Flynn, had been placed in a position which none but a man of unblemished honor should have filled? It is a disgrace to the house of Amavia that its eldest daughter should have placed herself under the protection of a disgraced man, a drunkard and a gambler—it were more disgraceful still if he were permitted to go unpunished. For three weeks the Princess Amirel, forgetful of her high estate, has made herself the friend of persons unfitted to consort with her—she has remained within these walls cultivating the acquaintance of the cashiered officer, who was to abuse her confidence—"

"Desmond!" exclaimed the Princess. "I ask you once more—do you permit this? Do you, you—for whom I have waited so impatiently—allow me to be thus insulted? Desmond, will you speak?"

Sir Desmond Adare's face had assumed a very unpleasant expression—he was gazing at von Hofberg with a species of fascination. He spoke with evident effort.

"I permit no insult to you, Princess," he said. "But you hear that—that this man," he pointed to me, "that

this man admits the truth of all that the Graf has said."

"This man does not admit the truth of what the Graf says respecting the robbery, Sir Desmond Adare," I remarked.

He looked from me to the Graf.

"What do you want?" he said.

"The arrest of Hanmer," answered von Hofberg, promptly enough. "I may as well tell you that we have wired to London for an experienced man from Scotland Yard, and that we wish Hanmer's secure detention until he arrives, when we shall give him in charge."

"You seem to over estimate your powers," said Sir Desmond with something like a sneer. "The jewels are the property of the Princess."

"The Amavia amethyst is the joint property of the reigning sovereign and the eldest daughter of the house," rejoined the Graf. "We ask you once more to summon a police official and to give this man in charge."

"If you do, Desmond," said the Princess, "I shall give the Graf von Hofberg in charge at the same time: for as there is a heaven above us I believe him to be the real thief."

Sir Desmond glanced from her to the Graf with eyes full of perplexity.

"What grounds have you for believing this man to be dishonest?" he suddenly exclaimed. "He has confessed to a bad record, but that does not make him a thief. Many a man has been a drunkard and a gambler with-

out losing honesty as regards the laws of meum and tuum."

"There is a man outside," said the Graf, quietly, "who might tell you something. Is it your pleasure to admit him?"

Sir Desmond nodded, half sulkily: it was evident that this coil was not to his taste. He watched von Hofberg step over to the door; he gazed with palpable distaste on the figure of Mr. Samuel Jefferson as it sidled into the room with crab-like motion.

Things were rapidly drawing towards some critical point; the Princess suddenly uttered an exclamation, rose from her seat, and walked towards the window. Nancy followed her; standing side by side, and, I believe, holding each other's hands, they watched in silence the scene which followed Mr. Jefferson's entrance.

"Who is this person?" Sir Desmond inquired with a look which plainly showed that he had no mind to receive gentlemen of the ex-orderly's stamp. "Some friend of yours, Graf von Hofberg?"

"This man is Mr. Jefferson, a private inquiry agent," replied the Graf, utterly unmoved by the half-contemptuous tone of the question. "He was at one time a private soldier in the regiment in which Mr. Hanmer served, and acted for a considerable period as his orderly. He can give you full proof of Mr. Hanmer's record."

"It is unnecessary. Mr. Hanmer has admitted the

truth of the charges you have brought against him—that is, as regards certain features of his military career. Let the man leave the room."

"Pardon me; there is one fact which I wish to establish. You have asked me what grounds I have for believing Mr. Hanmer to be dishonest. Permit me to ask Jefferson a few questions," said the Graf.

Sir Desmond appeared to be growing uneasy. He looked at me, at the Graf, and at Jefferson with glances of a distinctly unfriendly nature.

"I'm afraid all this is quite irregular," he said. "I had no idea that we were to go into matters so deeply."

"I have no objection to all the world hearing anything that this man may say concerning me," I said. "Let him speak."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Desmond.

The Graf motioned Jefferson to draw nearer the table.

"You knew Mr. Hanmer intimately for some time?" he said, with the readiness of an examining counsel. "His record was a bad one, was it not?"

Sir Desmond interposed with some show of anger.

"Stop!" he said. "To begin with, I will have no leading questions: to end with, I wish to hear no more of Mr. Hanmer's military record. He has admitted all that frankly enough. There is an end of it. If this person has anything to say on the point you raised, let him say it and then go about his business."

"I bow to your ruling," said the Graf, "though it

seems to me you are adopting a tone which is more adapted to a court of justice than to a private inquiry. I shall only detain you one moment more." He turned to Jefferson again.

"Was there ever any question of Mr. Hanmer's honesty during the time you acted as his orderly?" he asked.

Jefferson's face assumed a pained expression.

"I regret to say there was, sir. It was towards the end of Mr. Hanmer's unfortunate career that it happened—"

Again Sir Desmond interposed with signs of growing anger.

"I won't have this!" he said. "Listen, my man. I don't want to know whether you, for whose opinions I don't care two straws, consider Mr. Hanmer's career 'unfortunate' or not. Keep your opinions to yourself—give me the facts."

"I beg pardon, sir. The facts are that Mr. Hanmer was placed under arrest on a charge of falsifying the mess-room accounts and of appropriating certain moneys."

"Oh!" said Sir Desmond. "Well—what happened?"

"He was tried by court-martial, sir, and acquitted."

"Oh, he was acquitted, was he?"

"Yes, sir—but the general feeling, sir, was against the verd—"

Sir Desmond's anger burst forth. For a moment I thought he was going to launch a flood of red-hot remonstrance upon the Graf; then he restrained him-

self with an apparent effort but there was possibly more anger in the icy tones which followed than there would have been in a violent flood of speech.

"That will do," he said. "Leave the room, and the house." "Now, Graf," he continued, as Mr. Jefferson made an undignified exit, "I have heard all that you have to say, and I refuse to act in concert with you. The evidence of the man you have brought here is worth nothing. He suggests that Mr. Hanmer was guilty of a crime of which Mr. Hanmer's brother-officers found him innocent—"

"If I may mention the fact," I said, "the verdict of the court-martial was one of honorable acquittal, as the records will show."

"But court-martials may make mistakes," said the Graf. "The general feeling—"

Sir Desmond rose from his chair.

"That will do," he said. "I have nothing more to say to you, nor to your master. Stay—there is one thing I will say. Within a day or two the Princess Amirel of Amavia will be my wife. I know how you, Prince, who should have protected her, have exposed her to insult, and how you, Graf von Hofberg, have persecuted her with your unwelcome attentions. Now, let me warn you against interference. As for this robbery of the jewels, I will take it in hand myself. I desire to have no further communication with either of you concerning it, and I now request you to leave my house."

He crossed over to a bell as he spoke the last words: in another moment Prince and Graf were following Dennis down the corridor. That scene was over: it seemed to me that it was a mere nothing to the one which I knew must come.

The Princess sprang forward with a cry of joy: it was easy to see that she believed that her lover had come round to her view of matters and that all was well.

"Desmond!" she exclaimed. "That was splendid of you! Oh! now we shall have no more annoyance. I don't seem to care about the jewels now—let them go if only we can have no more of this anxiety and trouble."

"I am afraid we can scarcely relinquish such valuable property so light-heartedly," he said, looking at her with an indulgent smile. "But we will discuss that at our leisure: at present I wish to have some conversation with Mr. Hanmer."

"Ah, yes, to thank him for his kindness!" she said with a brilliant smile, an infinitesimal scrap of which extended itself to me.

"Mr. Hanmer shall certainly be requited," he answered with a bow. "There—will you and Miss St. Clair run away and let us talk?"

He opened the door as he spoke: the Princess and Nancy passed out; he closed it carefully upon their retreating figures and turned to me. For a moment he

regarded me steadily; I gave him as equally steady attention.

"There are certain things I must say to you, Mr. Hanmer," he said after a brief silence. "I am afraid they may not be pleasant."

"It is a matter of absolute indifference to me whether they are pleasant or not," I replied with as much carelessness as I could throw into my voice. He stared at me with eyes which expressed his inability to understand my attitude towards him.

"You appear to take matters very coolly," he said.

"It's the best way," I answered.

"I have heard of you," he said. "I did not know when I received the Princess's letter at Southampton yesterday that you were the man whose memory was somewhat strong at Ahmednagar."

"Indeed!" I said. "But you know it now."

"Unfortunately, I do. This is not pleasant, Mr. Hanmer," he said, beginning to walk up and down the room as if agitated by the events which were crowding upon him. "I desire to be just, but I will put it to you frankly —do you consider yourself a fitting person to be here in the capacity in which I find you?"

"If one looks at it from the world's standpoint, no!" I answered. "If I regard it from my own, yes."

"I suppose you regard yourself as a reformed character?" he said.

"I am certainly not going to discuss myself with you," I replied.

He stiffened at that: his pride rose visibly and his tone became distant and icy.

"Very good," he said, "but permit me to remind you of your position. You are a disgraced man, and you are in this house under circumstances which reflect the greatest discredit upon you. You ought to have retained some of the feelings of an officer and a gentleman: had you done so you would never have permitted the Princess to be lured into a false position. She is very innocent; she has an unfortunate readiness to believe in human nature and—"

I gave no further heed to him at that moment; something that occurred at the further end of the room drew every scrap of my attention away from his platitudes. The apartment in which all these goings-on were taking place was one of considerable size, and several doors gave access to it. At its lower end was a door which opened into the great drawing-room; between it and the centre of this apartment stood a screen. There were a great many mirrors on the walls, and some in antique frames standing here and there about the room. As I stood lounging against the mantelpiece I saw something in one of these mirrors which made me forget that Sir Desmond Adare was lecturing me. That something was the stealthy opening of the drawing-room door, the ad-

vent of the Princess, and her advance on tiptoe to the screen, behind which she carefully hid herself. I could see the half-roguish smile on her face as she prepared herself to listen: after that I looked at the betraying mirror no more. I gave my attention to Sir Desmond. Truth to tell, I was now so heartily soul-sick of the whole affair that I did not care what he said nor who heard him say it.

"It was most reprehensible on the part of Miss St. Clair, who knew your record, to introduce you to the Princess," he was saying. "I cannot understand her want of perception—"

"Ah!" I said as bitterly and sneeringly and cynically as possible. "Of course you don't. You see, Nancy is a child of the people. She has a warm heart and believes in her friends, even when they happen to be converted drunkards and gamblers. I daresay that Nancy honestly believed that she and I might serve as watchdogs of humbler sort until the full-bred hound came along."

That hit him just where I meant it to. He became frozen on the instant.

"I have no wish to continue this scene, Mr. Hanmer," he said. "You quite understand that your services are dispensed with, and that your presence in my house is distasteful to me. There is one matter which I will attend to at once, and we will then consider this interview at an end."

He walked over to an escritoire which stood in one

of the windows and for a moment was engaged in writing. When he turned round he held a check in his hand.

"I trust you will find this sufficient remuneration for your services," he said, and he held the slip of colored paper out to me.

I stared him out of countenance.

"Pay your servants their wages, Sir Desmond Adare," I said. "When I am one of them I will ask for my due."

Then he lost his temper. The bit of paper crumpled up in his fingers: his face flushed angrily.

"By God!" he said. "Do you know that your liberty is in my hands? I can hand you over to the police within the hour!"

"You may do so within the minute, if you like," I retorted. "I think I should prefer that to your insolence."

He stared at me as if he scarcely comprehended the scene in which he was taking part: his hand sought for the bell-rope and clutched it.

"You shall leave this house at any rate," he said.

But before he could pull the bell there was a sound in the room, and I turned to see the Princess standing between us and the screen—and at the sight of her I cursed myself for the utter fool I was. For there she stood, white-faced and sorrowful, with all the light and happiness gone out of her eyes, and in her hands, which hung straight down before her, she fingered something with pitiful, nervous movements.

"No!" she said. "Or if he goes, I go! Oh, Desmond,

how could you—how could you! I have told you what faithful friends these have been to me—how they have thought and planned for me—and you would turn them away like dogs! You! Oh!" she cried, the color suddenly rushing back to her face. "It is an insult to me that you should insult my friends, and—and—" her voice grew faint and very troubled as she put out one hand and laid something on the table—"that is your ring, Desmond," she said, and turning her back upon us walked slowly and steadily out of the room.

We both stood staring at the glittering thing lying on the table between us—I looked up at him at last: his face was white to the lips and the sweat stood in beads on his forehead. He gazed at me as if some heavy blow had half-stunned him; the appeal in his eyes and the sudden remembrance of the Princess's agonized face brought me to my senses. With a sharp cry which meant I know not what I leapt to his side and seized him by the arm.

"Quick, man!" I said. "Go to her at once—quick!"

And I half drew, half dragged him across the room to the door through which she had disappeared. As I tore it open I caught a glimpse of her, lying prone amongst the cushions of a sofa, and I heard her sob . . . then I pushed him inside, closed the door on him, and went away, still cursing myself for a fool and a brute.

CHAPTER XVIII

I EXCHANGE MY LODGING

IN the corridor I met Nancy. I took her by the arm and drew her away to a quiet corner of the stone hall. And thinking it well that she should know of all that was happening, I told her of what had occurred between Sir Desmond and myself, and of the appearance of the Princess on the scene, and the subsequent events. To my astonishment she did not seem to attach any great importance to the matter.

"I am not sure that that is not the best thing which could have happened," she said, thoughtfully. "It will help to clear up all this misunderstanding. Of course they will become reconciled, and if I know anything of Amirel she will bring Sir Desmond to a fitting sense of his position and duties."

"Well, there's an end of the matter so far as I am concerned," I said. "I shall clear out now, Nancy. By-the-bye, I must have a business talk with you, and hand over the balance of your money, minus ten pounds, which I shall charge for my professional services. Shall we square up now? I have an account of everything in my pocket-book, and I want to catch the 6.16 to Lim-

erick, so that I can travel by the night train to Dublin and get to town to-morrow."

She looked at me with an air of astonishment which changed to one of amusement.

"My dear Cosmo!" she exclaimed. "What a baby you are in some things! You surely don't tell me in sober earnest that you are thinking of returning to London?"

"I am very much in earnest, Nancy," I replied. "I intend to be in town to-morrow afternoon—unless you refuse to pay me my fees."

"But you can't leave here at present," she said. "Don't you see that with this charge hanging over you, your sudden departure would be taken as a certain amount of proof of your guilt? No, my dear Cosmo, you must remain here; let the Graf do his worst; meet the charges against you, and show that you are not afraid of them."

"Oh!" I said, rather blankly. "I see—never thought of that, Nancy. Yes, of course, I'll stay and see the thing through. But I can't stay here—the master of the house has turned me out."

"Um," she said, nodding her head. "Before night falls he will probably be asking you to turn in again. Listen to me, Cosmo—pack your portmanteau, order out the motor, drive into Ennis and put up at one of the hotels. I lay you ten to one that before the evening is over Sir Desmond is at your door to ask you to return. Leave a formal note here saying where you may be found."

I considered the project carefully: it seemed to fit in with my mood—after all, what I chiefly desired was to get out of that house.

"Very good," I said. "I'll go, Nancy. But since this adventure is at an end, let us settle up our financial business. Look here—"

"It's not at an end," she said, pushing my pocket-book aside; "that must wait until Amirel can attend to it. If you imagine that I am financier-in-chief you are wrong, Cosmo, quite wrong. Now order out the car and get off."

Within a quarter of an hour I had said good-bye to Nancy, and was bowling away across the park. I felt a sense of relief when we were clear of the house—it seemed to me that a vast burden of responsibility had been removed from my shoulders. After all, I had fulfilled my task—I had protected the Princess from harm until the arrival of her lover, and if I had not been able to protect the jewels I had the satisfaction of knowing that they had been abstracted by some ingenious trick, so wonderful of its sort that it might have baffled anyone. That I myself had been accused of stealing the contents of Princess Amirel's satchel troubled me not at all. I knew that in her eyes I stood as innocent as an unborn child, and knowing it I cared for naught else.

As we drove along the road to Ennis we overtook Mr. Paul Carburton trudging along in the dust. He looked

tired, and I bade the groom who was driving me to stop.

"Can we give you a lift?" I said. "There's a seat behind."

He looked up: then came across and began to climb into the car.

"Thanks," he said. "I'm a bit leg-weary. I've had a stiffish day. However, I'm nearly through with my picture—it will be done in a few days."

"You don't carry it backwards and forwards, then?" I said, as he settled himself on the back seat, and we moved on again.

"No. I leave canvas and everything at a little farmstead near the scene I'm painting," he replied. "My goodness, I wouldn't carry all that twice a day—I find the walk back quite enough. I always go out in a car, the walk home is for exercise. I see you've got a portmanteau—going off, eh?"

"I am going to spend a few days at Ennis," I replied. "By-the-bye, can you recommend your hotel?"

"Oh, it's all right," he answered. "But it's very full; I doubt if you'll get a room there just now. Try the hotel by the cathedral. I believe there's room there; that's where the two foreigners are staying."

I knew that as well as he did, and it did not altogether encourage me to go there. But it suddenly occurred to me that if I were located in the same house I might have an opportunity of studying the habits and

customs of the Graf von Hofberg, and of obtaining knowledge and information which might eventually prove useful.

"I think I will go there," I said; then, in a sudden burst of hospitality, springing, I believe, from overstrung nerves, I added, "and I hope you'll dine with me to-night, Mr. Carburton; we may be company for each other."

"Thank you," he said, without any effusiveness or surprise. "I don't mind if I do; I'll come round about seven."

Mr. Carburton and myself descended from the motor together, and while he proceeded into the town I walked into the garden of the hotel. There, in a corner where they were secure from interruption, I saw four men, who on closer inspection turned out to be Prince Adalbert, von Hofberg, Jefferson, and a little man, whom I instinctively set down as a solicitor. They sat round a table on which glasses and bottles were displayed and though Jefferson's chair was drawn a little apart, and his attitude that of deep respect, it was plain to see that all four were cheek by jowl. When I entered, the little man was evidently explaining some nice point, and elucidating it with many gestures and grimaces; His Highness of Amavia was still puffing out his cheeks and fingering his moustaches; von Hofberg, arrayed in a new suit of flannels, looked as cool and calm as ever.

As I walked across the garden to the door of the hotel I was in full view of the four, and each regarded me with a stare in which there was something more than curiosity. I entered the house, arranged about a room, had my portmanteau carried in, and then, having dismissed the driver with a message to Nancy which informed her of my whereabouts, I lounged in the porch, smoking and looking about me. For a while the four eyed me inquisitively. I paid no more attention to their presence than if they had been utter strangers. They resumed their conversation in low tones, and I presently went away to stroll about the town until the hour arrived at which I had ordered dinner for Mr. Carburton and myself.

When the little artist rejoined me I was much relieved to find that his original ideas as to clothing appeared to cease with the close of his day's labor. He presented himself in a neat suit of blue serge, and although his necktie was voluminous and tied in a fashion affected by Frenchmen and decadents, it was of black silk and pleasantly inconspicuous. We dined very amicably together, and we had the coffee-room all to ourselves; the Prince and the Graf being accommodated in another apartment where, according to the waitress, they were served on their own china by a gentleman in a gold-hued coat and a sky-blue waistcoat.

"I hear there was robbery at Annalleen last night," said Mr. Carburton, over his second cutlet.

"Oh! Who told you that?" I inquired.

"It's talked of in the town," he answered, carelessly. "I heard them discussing it at the 'Crown' as I came out. Jewels, wasn't it?"

"There was certainly a robbery during the night," I replied. "But I don't know how the news of it got abroad."

"Oh, the servants!" he said. "You can't keep them from talking, whatever you do. They'll have spread the news all over Ennis. I hear that Sir Desmond Adare has returned, too. By-the-bye, isn't there some romance about the Princess and him?"

I think I showed some trace of annoyance at this, for he added, "Oh, well, never mind; sorry I spoke; but they're talking of that too," and changed the subject.

After we had dined we went into the garden to smoke our cigars, and we had not been there long when the noise of a rapidly approaching car sounded from the street. It seemed just outside the high wall which shut us in. Within another moment the door of the garden was opened and Sir Desmond Adare appeared. He caught sight of me as he entered. I excused myself to Mr. Carburton and went to meet him.

It is marvellous how wonderfully some men change in view of altered circumstances. I had left this man in a position which was painful to him and to me; he came to me now utterly changed in every way. He

marched forward with an air of joyous confidence, and he stretched out his hand to me with a frank geniality which seemed to be mingled with a clearly-suggested appeal for the blotting out of the immediate past. I gave him my own readily enough; he took it with a firmness of grip which showed the honesty of his changed demeanor.

"Mr. Hanmer," said he, "I beg your pardon. I have treated you infamously, and I shall never cease to regret it. It is possible that you can make more excuses for me than I can make for myself—will you at any rate permit me to say that I sincerely believe you absolutely innocent of the charge brought against you by von Hofberg, and that I can never sufficiently thank you for your services to the Princess. I think I must have been over-strained and over-wrought this afternoon," he went on, with some signs of excitement. "Look at this, Mr. Hanmer—I received it at Southampton at the same time that I received several letters from the Princess which she had forwarded there to await my arrival. I have little doubt that this precious production is to work upon my feelings. I was smarting from the sting of that pernicious stuff when I arrived at Annalleen this afternoon, Mr. Hanmer, and I am afraid that I allowed it to influence me in some degree against you. For that I unreservedly beg your pardon."

He handed me a folded newspaper as he spoke, and

pointed to an article marked at the corner by bold scorings of a blue pencil.

I recognized the paper as one of those pestilent publications which exist on personal gossip and chatter, and in exchange for a penny present the inquisitive vulgar with the latest scandal and rumor concerning their betters. The article was skilfully written; it mentioned no names; it was true in fact and substance, as the lawyers say; and its innuendo and suggestion were brilliantly wicked. It set forth the anxiety and trouble at present being occasioned to her family by a European Princess of a romantic turn of mind who had fallen madly in love with a well-known Irish baronet, who was not merely handsome and rich but also an officer in one of the crack cavalry regiments now stationed in South Africa. The bare facts of the Princess's flight from her brother's court were given with a careful adherence to the truth, and the circumstances of her journey to the west of Ireland were narrated with an exactitude which showed that our every movement must have been followed with jealous eyes—the eyes, I made no doubt, of Samuel Jefferson. Naturally enough the sting of the whole article came in the last paragraph, wherein the writer expressed his regret that the Princess's youth and inexperience should have betrayed her into the folly of choosing for temporary protector a disgraced and cashiered ex-officer, whose excesses with cards and bottles were still the talk of certain military

circles, and wound up with a hint that the gallant lover, who was reported to be travelling hot-foot from South Africa in order to marry this Princess, would scarcely care to find that his lady-love had spent three weeks in the intimate society of a person of whose services—"to use the polite language of the 'Gazette'—His Majesty had had no further need!"

I read the article through, word for word, and handed the paper back to Sir Desmond.

"I am not sure that the writer is not quite correct in all he says," I said, "save, of course, in his innuendo and suggestion. It seems to me that I ought to ask your pardon for a good deal of thoughtlessness. The fact was that Miss St. Clair was anxious to the last point of impulsiveness to serve her friend, and that neither she nor I ever thought of the harm we might be doing. I began to think of all that when it was too late, and I shall go on thinking of it as a grave mistake. I confess that at first I merely joined in this adventure to please my old friend Nancy—afterwards I tried to serve the Princess to the best of my ability. It's the usual thing, after all —one always seems to do most harm when one really intends to do some real good."

"There is no harm done," he said, warmly. "As for this thing"—here he tore the paper in half and flung the pieces away—"I care that much for it. And now, Mr. Hanmer, will you return with me to Annalleen? You will do me a favor in more ways than one if you will.

I shall be glad of your help in trying to get the truth regarding this robbery, and I shall also be glad of your company, for I am like to be a lonely man otherwise."

I looked at him in astonishment.

"The Princess and Miss St. Clair have left me for my old friend Mrs. Moore's house, a few miles from the Castle," he said, smiling at the wonder in my face. "Mrs. Moore travelled with me from London and at once offered to accommodate the Princess until our wedding-day, which will be within the week. So come back and keep me company. I feel," he continued, hurriedly and rather shyly, "that I treated you so very churlishly this afternoon that I ought to make some amends."

"If you will excuse me," I said, "I think I shall stay here for a few days. To tell you the truth I want to keep von Hofberg and the man Jefferson under observation. I suspect von Hofberg and my old orderly of being in collusion about something or other, and I shall be much surprised if we do not see some development of the matter in a day or two. I could not in any case return with you to-night, because I have a guest here," I concluded, pointing out Mr. Carburton, who had all this time remained in thoughtful contemplation of the glories of a flower-bed.

"A friend of yours?" inquired Sir Desmond, glancing at the painter with obvious interest.

"Oh, no; nor even an acquaintance in the usual sense," I replied, and I gave him an account of our various

dealings with the little artist, and of his visits to the Castle and his successes with the ladies as a conversationalist.

Sir Desmond desired to make Mr. Carburton's acquaintance, and I led him across the garden and made the two known to each other. Carburton, with his usual impudence, immediately began to question Adare as to what he had seen of service and then plunged into a dissertation on the necessity of army reform, in the course of which he showed so much real knowledge of his subject that we both became deeply interested. The twilight grew towards dusk and the little man still talked, emphasising his points, as was his wont, with many movements of his hands. Sir Desmond roused himself at last with something of an effort.

"That is very interesting," he said, rising from the rustic bench on which we had all been sitting for the best part of an hour. "We must continue this conversation, Mr. Carburton. You must dine with me some evening very soon—I am keeping up my bachelor state for a few days longer."

Mr. Carburton accepted the invitation in his usual cool fashion, and remarked that he would drive out with me to Annalleen on the day Sir Desmond named.

"I hope to see Mr. Hanmer back at the Castle tomorrow," remarked Sir Desmond. Then he turned to me. "Come back whenever you please," he said. "Your room awaits you."

We went out to the street together. Sir Desmond's motor had been parked some distance from the hotel —we walked along the street, under the shadow of the cathedral, to meet it. Overhead the stars were coming out of a sky that had already deepened to a dark purply blue: from the adjacent streets came a murmur of voices softened by the calm influence of the evening. Something in the atmosphere of the place suggested peace and rest: I was suddenly aware that I had become very sleepy.

"I have not quite got over the effects of last night," I said to Sir Desmond, who was walking in front with me, Carburton lingering behind to light his pipe. "I can feel the influence of that drug yet. By-the-bye, how was Deasy when you left?"

"Coming gradually round," he replied. "He was still confused and hazy about everything, but I hope to find him in his usual health to-morrow morning—it is possible that he may be able to throw some light on this affair."

We had reached the machine by that time, and Carburton coming up to us, we all said good-night and Sir Desmond drove away. The artist and I strolled slowly back. As we reached the garden gate I could not repress a yawn.

"Sleepy, eh?" said he. "Well, I'm a bit sleepy, myself—I'll go home."

I asked him to have a drink before he went, and we

stepped into the hall of the hotel. Two stalwart members of the R. I. C. lounged at the bar; as we entered they turned and looked at us. They pulled themselves up into the usual soldierly attitude, and one of them, a sergeant, coming forward, saluted me with every show of respect.

"Mr. Hanmer?" said he.

I nodded assent.

"Could I have a word with you, sir?" he said, looking meaningly at the door of the coffee-room.

I walked into the apartment thus indicated. There was only a dim light burning there, and when I turned it up I saw that the other policeman had followed close upon us. Carburton stood hovering about the door, peering into the room through his big spectacles.

"Yes?" I said, looking at the man who had first addressed me. "You have something to say to me?"

He looked at me with a smile of genuine amusement, and began fumbling in his breast pocket, from which he presently drew forth an official-looking paper.

"Well, the truth is, sir," said he, "I have a warrant for your arrest. Will I read it to you?"

"I think it's scarcely necessary," I replied. "I suppose I am accused of stealing the jewels which disappeared at Annalleen last night?"

"Indeed, it is so, your honor," he said, still seeming to find something highly amusing in the situation.

"All right," I said. "I suppose you wish me to accompany you?"

"If your honor will so far accommodate us," he replied.

I called Carburton in, told him of this new development of affairs, got him to fetch two or three things from my room, and then, in company with the sergeant, went out into the hall and told the people of the hotel exactly how matters stood. After that Carburton and I walked off with the two policeman in a quiet and peaceful procession.

Carburton, certain formalities having been gone through, wanted to give bail for me to any amount the inspector liked to name, and it was only through my entreaties and protestations that he consented to go away. He left, declaring that he was a well-known man and able to buy up the whole town. When he had finally departed, and the sergeant, still smiling and full of enjoyment of the whole situation, had locked me up, I stretched myself out on the narrow bed and immediately fell into a sound and dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XIX

THE INGENUITY OF DEASY

THE sergeant to whom my arrest appeared to afford so much amusement visited me at an early hour next morning, and made himself as useful as a man possibly could under the circumstances. Either out of sheer good nature or from a stern conviction that he had been obliged to lay the wrong man by the heels, he discharged the duties of valet with great credit, and finally procured me breakfast from the hotel, managing by some means only known to himself to keep everything quite hot during its passage across the town.

"There'll be a great quantity of people in the court this morning, your honor," he remarked, as I began to eat and drink. " 'Tis in everybody's mouth, and they're besieging the doors already."

"Who's been talking about it?" said I.

"Oh, the boys will talk!" he replied, with supreme indifference. "Sure, the news of the likes of that travels fast."

"Well, I hope everybody will be pleased," I said.

"Oh, indeed they will, sir," he answered. "A good murder or a great robbery is meat and drink in a little place

like this. Sure, it'll be the sensation of the summer."

After that he slily informed me that devil a word would anybody say if I chose to smoke a cigar, and then went away to return in a few moments with Sir Desmond Adare, who had evidently left home in a great hurry, and had not slackened his speed until he burst into my cell.

"Why did you not send for me last night?" he exclaimed. "Carburton tells me that they would not take bail from him. That, of course, was only to have been expected, because he's a stranger. But they would have taken mine. I'm known, you see."

"Thanks very much," I answered, "but I really didn't want to take the trouble. I've had worse quarters than this more than once, and I slept like a top all night."

"Well, you'll soon be out of this," said he. "I fancy the other side will have a surprise that will rather open their eyes."

I looked at him with sudden curiosity: it was plain that something was affording him considerable amusement.

"Is there some new development?" I inquired. "Have you heard of anything—any clue to the real thief?"

"Ah, that's hard to say!" he answered. "But we shall prove that it was not you. The case will collapse rather startlingly. It's very amusing indeed."

"You are exciting my curiosity very much," I said. "May I ask what all this means?"

"I think I must not tell you," he replied, looking more amused than ever. "It's a pity to spoil a good effect. I may say, however, that Deasy is at the bottom of it—Deasy will pull down von Hofberg's house of cards."

"Then Deasy is himself again?"

"Oh, he is nearly all right. He was talking to me as I breakfasted about the circumstances of the robbery, and was interrupted by Carburton's arrival with the news of your arrest. Deasy was considerably put out, and immediately volunteered the information that he could clear that matter up at once if I would permit him and Dennis to attend the court this morning. Of course I said yes—and there are Deasy and Dennis sitting in solemn state on the benches until business begins."

"I am more curious and more mystified than ever," I said. "However, I suppose I shall soon be enlightened."

Then Sir Desmond went away, and I smoked a cigar and tried to imagine what it was that Deasy was going to say or do. I was not particularly relieved or gratified to know that the theory of my prosecutors was to be knocked on the head, because I knew that they had not a scrap of evidence against me which could ever be turned to any practical account, and I had accordingly never felt any anxiety as to my position.

From thinking about Deasy I turned to the prospects of our being able to trace the crime to the Graf.

I was certain as I was certain of my own existence that von Hofberg had by some clever trick contrived to secure the jewels, and was endeavoring to throw dust in everybody's eyes by laying the blame at my door. How to trace the crime to him and finally overthrow all his nefarious schemes appeared to me a Herculean task and one promising many brave adventures.

I was aroused from these reveries by the entrance of the sergeant, who took much pleasure in informing me that I was waited for, and forthwith conducted me into the court. I was immediately aware that as many people as could be squeezed within its four walls were staring at me with all their eyes: that every man, woman, and child was commenting upon my personal appearance; and that the whole place was literally seething with excitement. I looked around and began to recognize people. From the sea of faces turned in my direction I quickly picked out the familiar features of Deasy and Dennis. They caught my eye, and suddenly hung their heads and looked somewhat ashamed. I had barely time to wonder at this before I encountered the gaze of Carburton, who sat in the well of the court, attired as extravagantly as usual. He nodded reassuringly and made pantominic gestures which I quite failed to understand. Near him sat Prince Adalbert, glaring at the people, and going through his usual facial exercises; at his side sat von Hofberg in conversation with the sharp-faced little man whom I had seen in the hotel

garden: a little distance away the sleek countenance of Jefferson loomed through the atmosphere of the stuffy court like a full moon in a fog. I had seen all these faces before I suddenly became aware of the presence of the Princess and Nancy. They sat in the only part of the court which was not crowded, with Sir Desmond at one side, and a stout, motherly-looking old lady at the other. As they caught my eye they smiled and nodded. For the first time since I had entered the court I began to feel embarrassed, and I hastened to turn my attention elsewhere.

It appeared, when the proceedings were formally opened, that I was charged with stealing a certain jewel of great value, known as the Amavia amethyst, and that the person who charged me was its part-owner, His Highness the Prince of Amavia. There was some argument and quibbling between the Prince's attorney, the sharp-featured gentleman of the hotel garden, and my own, who turned out to be Sir Desmond's family solicitor, and there were some passages between both and the bench. I made out that all that was required by the prosecution at that time was a remand, and that only sufficient evidence to justify them in asking for one would be adduced.

It was evident that the little sharp-featured gentleman meant to make the best of a great occasion. He revealed all the romantic circumstances of the case in a flowery and impressive style. He painted the Princess

as a lady of charmingly innocent notions, who, from sheer inexperience of the world, had accepted the services of a desperado, and had trusted him implicitly. He laid stress on the bad record of the prisoner; he emphasised the fact that no one but the Princess, Nancy, and myself knew exactly what was in the satchel, and that only the Princess, Deasy, and I had seen it locked in the safe. It was known, it would be proved, that I was a penniless man with a bad record—it was in accordance with the strictest probability that I was the guilty person. And so on, and so on—the damning accusations invariably harking back to the fact that I had been a bad lot in bygone days, and therefore must naturally be a bad lot for ever.

I got tired of all this, and my interest only revived when the Princess was called to give brief and formal evidence as to her possession of the famous amethyst and of its disposal. She seemed anxious to add something to her evidence, and she left the box lingeringly, looking across the court at me as if to apologize for not there and then declaring her belief in my innocence. I knew exactly what was in her mind, and I smiled my thanks. And then they called Deasy.

It was plain to see that Deasy entered the witness-box from a stern sense of obligation and duty. He answered every question put to him in the briefest possible fashion, and he stood stiffly to attention and wore an expression which was more suggestive of distaste and

resentment than resignation. He corroborated the Princess's evidence as to the disposal of the satchel in the safe, and gave full particulars as to the strong room, its safeguard, the life and death of Peter, and my own knowledge of all these things. It certainly appeared from his part of Deasy's evidence that he and myself were the most likely persons to steal the amethyst. But then rose up Sir Desmond's man-of-law to ask Deasy a few questions.

"I believe," he said, in a quiet, casual, nothing-matters-very-much-ish sort of tone, "I believe you can prove to the court that Mr. Hanmer is quite innocent of this charge?"

Deasy became more palpably interested: so did everybody else.

"Oh, indeed, I can then, sir," he replied, promptly.

The solicitor looked at the magistrates, and from them to Deasy, and his eyes twinkled.

"Tell the worships your story," he said.

Deasy looked somewhat uncomfortable; he glanced at the bench, then at me, then at Sir Desmond; he seemed to brace himself to his task with a palpable effort.

"Well, your worships," he said at last. "It was in this way, and if there seems anything wrong about it I beg Mr. Hanmer's pardon, though what I did has turned out well for him in the end; indeed, it has! You see, gentlemen, when I knew there was great valuables in the little bag that Her Highness locked up in the safe

I was that anxious that I felt bound to exercise great care about the whole matter. Everything devolved upon me, your worships, and there was valuables of Sir Desmond's in the strong room, too. Oh, there was great wealth, indeed, inside these four walls, and 'twas a heavy responsibility for a man. And, begging his pardon, of course I didn't know who Mr. Hanmer was, though he was pleasant-spoken and civil, and apparently in great favor with the ladies. And, of course, I had to take precautions. And so a night or two after the Princess and her suite came to the Castle, Dennis and me had a consultation, for Dennis has served Sir Desmond's family nearly as many years as I have. And we struck on a plan that seemed good for everybody."

By this time every man in the court was listening with all his ears. It was evident that Deasy was going to reveal something. He looked at me with deepening apology in his face and went on.

"Well, your worships, I told Dennis that 'twas a great charge that was laid on me of protecting Her Highness's valuables, and that it was well to be on the safe side. 'And Mr. Hanmer,' says I, 'for what we know, Dennis, he might be one of these swell mobsmen that we hear of, for it's evident,' I says, 'from their conversation,' I says, 'that Mr. Hanmer and the Princess are not knowing each other long.' 'True for you,' says he, 'I have noticed the same thing myself.' 'He might be some swindler that has wormed himself into her so-

ciety; women is inexperienced,' I says. 'They are so,' says Dennis, 'especially when they're young,' he says. 'I have heard,' says I, 'of such things, and though Mr. Hanmer is as nice-spoken a gentleman as ever I met, it behoves us,' I says, 'to run no risks, for,' says I, 'you hear of burglars introducing themselves into the best families.' ' 'Tis so, indeed,' he says. 'Well,' says I, 'what'll we do to take full precautions?' and we sat thinking the matter over, your worships, for a long time, and at last we hit on a little plan that seemed satisfactory. In the daytime I was afraid of nothing, your worships, for I could keep an open eye on everybody in the house, one way or another, but at night there was more danger, and I thought that if Mr. Hanmer was a swell mobsman he would have confederates and be likely to let them in to the Castle. And so we just determined, all unknown to him, to make him secure for the night, and release him in the morning."

There was a roar of laughter all round the court; my friend the sergeant's merriment shook the dock. Sir Desmond's solicitor's voice broke in.

"You mean to say that from that time forward until the night of the robbery you took precautions which imprisoned Mr. Hanmer in his own room from the time he retired until next morning?"

"Indeed, then, we did, sir—not that he ever knew anything about it himself. For you see, your worships," continued Deasy, turning to the bench, "it was a neat

job that we made of it, once we had got the notion of how to do it. We just fixed a little, strong staple in the door of his room, about two inches from the bottom and on the outside, and another strong, little staple on the door jamb convenient to it, and the blacksmith made us a double hook, and when it was slipped into the two staples sure the door was as fast as a church."

There was more laughter at this, and the solicitor went on again.

"You mean that when the hook was attached to both staples it was impossible to open the door from inside the room?"

"It was so, sir."

"How did you manage matters so that Mr. Hanmer did not discover this little trick?"

"Well, sir, it is rather dark in that corridor, and besides, would a gentleman be wasting his time looking down at the bottom of his bedroom door for things like them?"

"The court is to understand, then, that you secured Mr. Hanmer in his room in this way every night?"

"Indeed, we did, sir; the catch was slipped on to the staples every night by my own hand just before I retired to my own room, and taken off by Dennis at his own rising in the morning."

"One question—you swear on your oath that on the night on which you were drugged you had used this precaution?"

"I do, sir. I went along the corridor in my felt slippers—don't I always go round the house in that way every night?—and just slipped the catch. 'Twas the easiest thing in the world to do, sir."

Sir Desmond's solicitor sat down and looked satisfied. The sharp-faced little man leapt to his feet and looked at Deasy.

"Can you swear that the prisoner was in his room that night at the moment you put the catch on the door?" he asked.

"I can," said Deasy. "Didn't I hear him singing 'Barney O'Hea'?"

Once more the court gave itself up to laughter. The man of law, seeing his case crumbling to dust, made another effort.

"Could not the prisoner have left his room by the window?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Deasy, with a sly look at me, "but he'd have broken his neck over the Rock of Annalleen."

The attorney looked down hastily as the laughter redoubled. He pulled himself together and tried a final shot.

"It seems a strange proceeding," he said, "that you should thus treat a gentleman who had come to the Castle as a member of the Princess's suite. You must have had reason to suspect him?"

"Not one of them at first, sir," replied Deasy. "It

was just reasonable caution that I took at first—just caution enough to make sure. Indeed, then, I never suspected Mr. Hanmer until I saw him making friends with the foreigneering gentleman there"—he nodded his head towards the Graf—"and then I thought we were very likely being manœuvred for by the swell mob, sir."

Deasy stood down amidst continued laughter, and Dennis stepped into his place. His evidence was short and satisfactory. He corroborated the butler on every point, and swore positively that he had found the catch intact on the previous morning. And so there came a speedy end to the proceedings, and the crowded audience departed to laugh over the way in which Deasy's remarkable ingenuity had solved a difficulty which he had never foreseen.

As the court cleared Deasy came up to where I was standing in conversation with Carburton. He still wore the sheepish, rather ashamed look which I had noticed when I entered the dock, but it was mingled with a sly expression of huge delight, and I knew that he was proud of himself because his actions had achieved such a remarkable result. He begged my pardon with much show of humility, and appeared much relieved when I told him that I bore him no malice for his trick.

"And, indeed, it has turned out well, sir," he said; "but I'd like to lay my hands on the murdering thief

that drugged me. It's a clever man that did, sir—oh, it is indeed! There was nothing you could suspect, sir. I went to bed as quiet as a lamb."

"You didn't taste anything in your grog, eh?" asked Carburton.

"I did not, sir. I read my book, and smoked my pipe, and drank my drop of whiskey, sir, and went to bed peaceful, never thinking what sort of sleep it was I was to have," he answered.

"Deasy," said I, "is there anybody you suspect? Do you think any of the servants are mixed up in this?"

But Deasy had formed no suspicions respecting anyone. He was in a state of absolute amazement with regard to the whole thing, and it was evident that there was nothing to got out of him yet. He presently went away, still apologizing to me for the trick he had played upon me, and Carburton (who by this time appeared to consider himself one of us) and I walked over to Sir Desmond and the ladies, who were chatting with the former's solicitor. We all went out into the street together: in front of the courthouse an admiring crowd had gathered together in order to watch the departure of the 'quality,' and the Princess, Nancy, and their hostess drove off amidst murmurs of admiration.

"There will be no more secrecy or privacy about the affair now," said Sir Desmond. "Everybody in this and the next county will consider it their own business from this time henceforth until something more interesting

comes along. We shall be discussed and discoursed on by every old woman in Clare. Hello; it's nearly two o'clock. I think I shall lunch at your hotel, Hanmer, and then see the police about this affair of the robbery. That must be properly inquired into."

We went along to the hotel, and at Sir Desmond's invitation the solicitor and Carburton accompanied us. We lunched together in the coffee-room, and as we had the apartment to ourselves we discussed the situation with considerable freedom. Here, again, Carburton came to the front with numerous opinions, suggestions, and theories. I confess that I grew impatient of his perpetual cleverness: the little man seemed to be able to discuss every subject under the sun—a thing that to me was somewhat too abnormal to be wholesome. Sir Desmond and the man of law, however, listened to him with respect; normal or abnormal, Carburton certainly possessed the power of compelling his hearer's attention.

We had been engaged in this fashion for some time when the waitress brought in a card to Sir Desmond. He glanced at it, and then looked at his attorney with some surprise and amusement expressed in his face.

"It is Mr. Lipsett," he said. "The man who prosecuted you, Hanmer. I suppose he comes as an emissary from von Hofberg. What can he want? Shall I see him?"

"I think it would be advisable," said the solicitor. "We may learn something."

So Mr. Lipsett was brought in, and at Sir Desmond's

invitation he took a chair and a glass of wine. He pledged us all very pleasantly, and, turning to me, made some facetious remark upon the changed circumstances under which we now met.

"The fortune of war, sir; the fortune of war!" he said. "Here to-day, there to-morrow. Sir Desmond, I come to you on behalf of my client, His Highness the Prince of Amavia. His Highness deeply regrets his hasty conduct in regard to Mr. Hanmer, and begs to apologize, in the frankest fashion, for his recent action in respect to that gentleman. He is now assured of Mr. Hanmer's absolute innocence in this matter, and is pained to think that he should have caused Mr. Hanmer any inconvenience. I trust His Highness's apologies will be accepted in the spirit in which they are offered."

"Pray assure the Prince of Amavia that I am greatly obliged to him, Mr. Lipsett," said I. "I have suffered no inconvenience whatever."

"I rejoice to hear you say so, Mr. Hanmer. Well, Sir Desmond, His Highness further charges me to propose to you that between himself and you there should be formed an alliance for the purpose of discovering the missing jewels. On hearing of this robbery the Graf von Hofberg wired to London for a first-class detective. They have sent Inspector Harland from New Scotland Yard. He has arrived, and is now in the house. His Highness begs you to see Inspector Harland, who is, I understand, one of the cleverest men of his profession

in Europe, and to give him every facility for pursuing his work."

"I have no objection, Mr. Lipsett," answered Sir Desmond. "It is a reasonable request, and one that I am perfectly willing to comply with."

Mr. Lipsett bowed and withdrew. Carburton finished his wine leisurely, lighted a cigarette, and rose.

"Well, I'm off," he said. "I want to catch the afternoon sunlight for my picture. I shall finish it tomorrow."

"Don't forget that you dine with me day-after-tomorrow," said Sir Desmond. "I will then show you the sketch maps I was speaking of."

Carbutron nodded his head. He put on his white sombrero and picked up his great sun-umbrella with leisurely movements, said good-bye collectively, and lounged out of the coffee-room by one door as Mr. Lipsett and the detective entered it by the other.

CHAPTER XX

I AM OFFERED A PARTNERSHIP

LOOKING upon the man from Scotland Yard as a party of juveniles look upon an elderly and therefore a presumably wise person whose entrance during the course of some particularly intellectual game gives promise of the speedy solution of many knotty problems, we were all, I think, a little surprised to find that Mr. Harland's personal appearance was by no means indicative of great genius. He was neither tall, nor intense of expression; his forehead did not bulge, nor did he gaze at you in a fashion which suggested that he already knew every particular crime laid down against you in the book of records; he even abstained, the formal introduction over, from staring at us as if we were so many entomological specimens. Mr. Harland, in short, was quite non-suggestive of that air of romance and of mystery which is supposed to hang about the outward appearance of the professional searcher-out of wrongdoers, and I should have passed him for ever and a day in the streets ere I had done him the ill-service of suspecting him to be that pest of modern society—the amateur detective. He was a short, rather stout person, chubby and ruddy of countenance, and he affected

a well-trimmed moustache, easy-fitting clothes of yellowish tint, and large boots with strong nails in the soles. He carried an ash stick in one hand and a deer-stalker hat in the other, and he would have passed very well as a highly respectable Englishman, who might have been a grocer, a Chancery barrister, or a peer with a taste for breeding shorthorns.

Mr. Harland, accomplishing the necessary preliminaries with the ease and grace of the practiced hand, requested to be furnished with a cup of tea and with the fullest particulars of the case. It fell to my lot to tell him of all that had befallen us since the setting out of our party from London, and it took some little time to reel off the story, especially as I was becoming somewhat weary of repeating it with parrot-like iteration. The man was a fine listener. He faced me and his tea-tray with the signs of steady attention writ strongly upon his homely face, and whenever he lifted his cup to his lips he still kept his eyes on mine. He made no notes and asked no questions, but you felt that he was carefully storing away every word that was said to him, and that some of the words were being labelled and wrapped up and hidden in special corners of his brain, from whence he would produce them exactly as they were wanted. He observed a strict silence until I had made an end of what one might call the obvious history of the case. When I had said my last word he nodded three times.

"Much obliged to you, sir," he said. "Allow me to congratulate you on your very lucid statement. Well, gentlemen, there does not appear to be much to go on, and if you'll permit me I'll go on it after my own fashion. Let's see now, I was sent for by the foreign gentlemen upstairs, and they appear to be transferring me to you, Sir Desmond Adare. Well, perhaps it will be as well if I say at once that I shall work this affair entirely in my own way. I shall not come to any one for orders or suggestions, and if I ask for information or advice you'll understand that while I shall be glad of one I shall please myself as to whether I act on the other or not. In short, gentlemen, I propose to carry out my inquiry into the loss of these jewels as seems best to me. It's quite evident that the foreign gentleman upstairs suspects Mr. Hanmer there: it's just as evident that some of you believe the Graf von Hofberg to be at the bottom of all this. Well, I don't suspect anybody at present. What I chiefly desire just now is to clear my ground. All I want is permission to go here and there about your house and estate, Sir Desmond Adare, to talk to your servants as much as I please, and to generally conduct the business as I think fit. I think that's all now. This seems a decent house to stay at, and I'll just arrange matters with the people."

Mr. Harland, whose *metier* seemed to be the off-hand and nonchalent treatment of everything and everybody,

was about to rise and leave us when the solicitor who had acted for the Prince of Amavia stopped him.

"There is just one matter which I must mention before Mr. Harland goes," he said. "Sir Desmond, I am further charged by His Highness the Prince to ask if you will join him in the matter of a reward. The Prince, who is deeply concerned as to the fate of the amethyst, which is, I need hardly remind you, a precious heirloom, will give one thousand pounds to anyone giving information which will result in the recovery of the amethyst. Will you join him in this offer? I am informed that the full value of the Princess's jewels is very considerable indeed."

Sir Desmond looked at the detective, who shrugged his shoulders.

"It will do no harm," said he, anticipating the question which Sir Desmond was about to put to him. "I don't think it will do any good, either. But, as I say, it will do no harm."

"Mr. Harland," said Sir Desmond, "pray tell me if you have formed any theory as to who it is that has carried out this robbery."

The detective's face became blank; he shook his head.

"Quite too soon, Sir Desmond," he said. "Perhaps I may be able to tell you something in a day or two. There is only one thing I can say at present."

"And that is—?"

"That the affair has been pretty carefully planned and worked out, and that the mere fact of that shows it is probably the work of an experienced hand," answered Mr. Harland. "It may be that some clever Continental thief is at the bottom of it, or that a gang of 'em have engineered the whole thing."

"But that," said Sir Desmond in some surprise, "that would argue that they had had accomplices in my own house."

"There's nothing very surprising about that," answered the detective, drily. He rose from the table, nodded cheerfully to everybody, said "Good-afternoon, gentlemen," and went out of the room. In a moment we heard him in loud-voiced and pleasant colloquy in the hall, where he was endeavoring to persuade the landlady that he was a true-born Irishman and could speak the language like a native.

"Mr. Harland appears to set upon his work in a light-hearted spirit," observed Sir Desmond as he rose from his chair.

"He's a great reputation," said one of the lawyers. "It was he tracked down the Temple Baggage murderer—got the least bit of a clue and ran his man down like a blood-hound. Sure I was thinking of it all the time he was sitting there sipping his tea and listening to Mr. Hanmer."

One by one they all went away, and I was left alone. I amused myself with the newspapers for the rest of the

afternoon; at six o'clock the waitress came into the garden to ask me if I would mind if Mr. Harland dined in the coffee-room with me at seven. He had ordered his dinner at the same hour as myself, and one cooking would do for the two of us. Mr. Harland and I accordingly enjoyed each other's society for some forty minutes, but he made no reference to the matter which was, no doubt uppermost in his mind. He chatted freely enough of other things, and showed a pleasant knowledge of a variety of subjects, and I was somewhat sorry when he rose from the table and left me in solitude.

I was not, however, condemned to spend a solitary evening. Strolling into the garden a little later I became aware of a rapid footstep behind me and turned to see von Hofberg following me down the path. He came up to me as if we were the greatest friends in the world and with absolute unconcern. No one could have guessed from his behavior that there had been passages of arms between us—his demeanor and tone were cordial and friendly.

"What an exquisite evening!" he said, gazing about him with something of the devotional air of a lover of natural beauty. "These Irish twilights affect me deeply. They are virginal in their delicacy and purity."

I took my cigar out of my mouth and looked at him.

"Did you come out on purpose to tell me that?" I inquired with a sneer which I found it impossible to suppress.

"Scarcely," he replied, cool and imperturbable as ever. "But I made that remark in all sincerity. I am a very sincere man, Mr. Hanmer, although you credit me with so many crimes and so much of evil intention."

I shrugged my shoulders; it did not suit me to talk with him.

"Seeing you alone in this garden," he continued, "I came down to converse with you. I desire, indeed, to hold a highly important conversation with you, Mr. Hanmer, if you will be so good."

"It were a pity to deprive His Highness of Amavia of your society and talents, Graf," I replied.

"Ah, do not be so insular, Mr. Hanmer!" he exclaimed. "As for His Highness of Amavia he is fast asleep in his easy-chair, having, as is his deplorable custom, taken too much wine at dinner."

I made no reply, and I half turned from him, hoping that he would take the hint to go away. He was not to be repulsed, however; drawing out his cigar-case, he selected a cigar and began to smoke.

"Mr. Hanmer," said he, presently, "oblige me by walking with me into the meadow which terminates this garden; there is a stile there on which we can sit and converse in privacy: an inn garden is not exactly the place in which one would choose to hold confidential communications."

"I cannot possibly understand the need of any con-

fidence between us," I said, remaining where he had found me.

"I give you my word of honor there is need," he said. "Come—I am showing my honesty in asking you to come with me out of earshot; what I have to say to you is meant for you alone."

I hastily reviewed the situation. I was there to find out as much of von Hofberg and his doings as I could; therefore it seemed well to fall in with his present suggestion. I knew, of course, that he was compassing some sort of mischief. Well, perhaps I could find out what it was, and whether it threatened any serious results to the people in whom I was interested.

"Very good," said I, "though I don't know any reason why I should oblige you by holding conversation with you."

He sighed gently as we paced down the path.

"How ungracious you English folk are!" he said. "When you might respond prettily you go out of your way to respond with bad grace."

"We have an unfortunate liking for the truth," I said.

"An unfortunate delusion that you love the truth, rather," he retorted. "Ah—well, who shall understand your strangeness? Once again—how beautiful are these Irish twilights and sunsets and dusks! I am much moved by them."

I made no answer to this outburst of sentimental gush, and we walked on in silence until we had reached the centre of the meadow. There we were all alone and perfectly secure from eavesdroppers, and von Hofberg, who had become thoughtful, suddenly stopped and addressed me.

"Hanmer," he said, with an earnestness which was obviously real, "I give you my word of honor that until this morning I was certain that you had stolen the jewels—certain!"

I continued to smoke, making no answer to this candid admission.

"I know quite well," he continued, "that you, at this very moment, believe that I am the thief, or that I instigated the theft, or that I know where the missing property is, or that I am in some way responsible for what has happened; in short, that I am, as you say, at the bottom of it. Hanmer, you are making just as great a mistake about me as I made about you."

He looked straight at me as he spoke. I suddenly recognized that he was in dead earnest. However machiavelian the man might be in character, and whatever end he had in view that moment, I became positively assured as I looked at him that what he had just said was the truth, plain and unvarnished—just the truth. I think he saw that I believed him, for he nodded his head as if in acknowledgment of what he perceived in my face.

"Yes," he said, "that's the plain truth. Indeed, I don't often deal in lies, Hanmer; they complicate delicate arrangements, and they don't pay; in fact, they're a cumbersome affair altogether in conducting matters in which there are niceties. It is the truth, then, that I don't know where those jewels are—I only wish I did! I have no more notion of their whereabouts, or of who it was that appropriated them, or of the method employed for their abstraction, than I have of the doings of the inhabitants of yonder star. In fact, I'm at a dead loss. The event of night before last has upset my calculations altogether."

I smoked in silence for awhile, revolving all this in my mind: I could not suggest any reason for this display of candor and confidence.

"Well," I said, "what then?"

"I should like to find those jewels," he said watching me carefully.

"There's two thousand reward for you if you do," I responded, lighting another cigar and endeavoring to preserve an air of absolute indifference.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Hanmer," he said, "let's be candid. It will cost us nothing, for there is not a soul to hear what we may say to each other, and no one would believe your word against mine, or mine against yours. We can say whatever we like to each other here, and afterwards separate with a comfortable consciousness that we need only

remember as much or as little as we please. What do you say?"

"I am waiting to hear what you have to say," said I.

"What I have to say," he went on, "is this: I desire to become possessed of the jewels of which the Princess has been robbed. There are many reasons why I should desire this—I need not specify them. I admit, with my usual frankness, that the chief one is closely identified with myself. After all, self-preservation is the first law of life—especially with men who are in desperate case."

"I believe your philosophy is absolutely correct, Graf," I replied.

"Well, my dear Hanmer, I am in desperate case," he said, very calmly biting off one end of a cigar and lighting the other with great deliberation. "It is quite evident to me that my chances with Princess Amirel are valueless—the wedding is to take place almost at once, I understand. I thought I had played my game very well; it appears that, like everybody else, I was not infallible. Very well, the next chance is the recovery—or shall we say the discovery?—of the Princess's jewels. They are worth—shall we say at the least two thousand pounds, eh, Hanmer? They are worth at the most—well, never mind that: there is time to discuss that later. I hope I make myself clear?"

"Very clear, indeed, as to your own intentions, Graf," I said. "May I ask what all this has to do with me?"

"Much—much!" he replied, with some slight show of

eagerness. "My dear Hanmer, you too are in desperate case; I know all about it, you know. You cannot go on like this—you must not lounge about here, living on the good-natured Nancy's money."

"Graf," said I, "you have spoken the truth very nicely so far, and I will respond by telling you that you are making a mistake. I am at present living at my own proper charges and on my own lawfully acquired earnings; do not, therefore, so far forget yourself as to oblige me to kick you over the hedge into the garden."

"Calm yourself," said he, "I apprehend the situation. But, Hanmer, the earnings will not last for ever. What then, my friend? Now listen to me—I have formed a high estimate of some of your powers and characteristics, and I invite you to become my partner in this matter of recovering the Princess's jewels. That detective will not find them in ten years—I know exactly what sort of man he is. It wants men of brains, Hanmer, like you and me. What say you?"

"First of all," said I, "I say—have you any clue?"

"No clue," he answered. "No clue, Hanmer—but a rapidly developing suspicion."

"You think it will develop into some result?"

"I do think so—oh, yes! But I need an astute partner, Hanmer."

"Why don't you try Jefferson?" I said. "You appear to have found him useful before."

The Graf swore softly and naughtily.

"Very good," said I. "One more question—supposing I go into partnership with you, and supposing we find the jewels, what then, Graf?"

"The jewels are worth at least two thousand pounds," he said, musingly. "A thousand pounds would start you out in life once more, friend Hanmer."

"A thousand pounds would not do much for the Graf von Hofberg," said I.

"True," said he, and appeared to be struck by the gravity of the thought. "True, Hanmer. But, after all, we need not discuss that question until we find the jewels, eh? There may be quite a different fate for the jewels when we recover them, you know. But one thing at a time is a safe motto, I think."

"Very," I answered. "Yes—I think we may leave that question until we find the jewels, and that, of course, will never be."

"Ah!" he said, quickly. "You decline my offer?"

"Absolutely."

He smoked in silence for a moment or two. Then—

"You are making a mistake," he said. "We should have done well—we have brains, both of us. However, that is an end of it. But let me give you a word of advice, Hanmer—do not cross me in this. I warn you, as a friend, that if you oppose yourself to me I shall kill you."

Without another word he turned away and strode off towards the garden. I remained in the meadow for some

time, thinking matters over, and wondering what von Hofberg meant when he spoke of having a rapidly developing suspicion. Whom did he suspect, and on what grounds? Well, I at any rate was not gong to be mixed up with him. I should have no objection to securing the reward of two thousand pounds for myself, but I drew the line at sharing it with him. And besides, the man did not want the two thousand pounds—he wanted the bigger prize of the jewels. Truly, he was an interesting person, this Graf von Hofberg—a very interesting person.

I turned back to the hotel feeling certain of one small matter. That was that the Graf would have no delicate scruples of conscience about shooting me if I crossed his path. He was the sort of amiable person who will shake your hand or blow out your brains with equal pleasure and waste little time in doing either.

CHAPTER XXI

CONCERNING MR. CARBURTON

THE next two or three days passed by in very uneventful fashion. Every person of my acquaintance in that corner of the world seemed to have business of his or her own with which I had nothing to do. I saw Harland at breakfast every morning, and at dinner every night; but though he talked freely enough about any other matter he never referred to the theft of the jewels. He disappeared altogether during the daytime, and I imagined that he was prosecuting his inquiries at Annalleen. Sir Desmond Adare passed out of my ken also, save on one occasion when I saw him driving into the town. Neither the Princess nor Nancy came in my way. I concluded that they were busying themselves in preparations for the wedding. I met Carburton once: he was just climbing into a car, and told me, in a somewhat irritable fashion, that if he were not interrupted he would finish his picture that day. I gathered from his tone that he wanted to be left to himself: otherwise I should have walked out to see him give the finishing touches to his canvas. There were not many inducements, however, for walking about the country

just then. It was already July, and the weather was very hot. I found it more in accordance with my tastes to sit in the garden of the hotel, or to lounge on the shady side of the streets, than to tramp along the blinding roads, which, in that part of Ireland, were thickly carpeted with white, penetrating dust. So I played the part of idler in honest fashion, wondering how long the spell would last and how soon I should be free to depart. Another idler of a different sort shared in the air of laziness which I communicated to my surroundings. For the greater part of the day Prince Adalbert lounged in the garden. He favored an easy-chair, placed in a shady corner; he consumed a great many glasses of whiskey and soda-water, cooled by large lumps of ice; he smoked an endless succession of cigars; he occasionally glanced at a French novel; when he was not engaged in one or other of these pursuits he was asleep with a handkerchief over his face. If I met him at the door, or in the hall, or on the paths of the garden, he glared and puffed, and pulled at his bristling moustache, and looked for all the world like an inflated fish. As for my friend the Graf I scarcely saw him during those days: Jefferson appeared to have departed for ever. Had it not been for an enterprising reporter, who ran me to earth, and vainly endeavored to get material for what he called "copy" out of me, my life at that time would have been wholly uneventful. I just vegetated from day to day, and it is a fact—probably due to the great heat—that I felt

very little interest in whatever might be going on.

Harland had arrived in our midst on the 3rd of July. On the 6th he mentioned the case to me for the first time. I was lazily endeavoring to eat some lunch in the coffee-room of the hotel when he came in, looking very warm and tired. He flung himself into a chair, looked about him with an air of distaste, remarked that it was impossible to eat comfortably in that sort of weather, and betrayed other signs of mental concern. I let him go his own way—I felt sure that he was going to tell me something. At last he spoke, pushing his chair back from the table and assuming a confidential attitude.

"Well, Mr. Hanmer," said he, "I'm about beaten by this case. I've been investigating the matter in a preliminary sort of fashion for three days now, and I haven't a single clue. It's quite evident that the person who poisoned the bull-dog and who administered the drug to you and to Deasy must have been a resident of the Castle at the time, but there is nothing whatever to connect anyone with these things. The whole affair is very puzzling. You see, it is absolutely certain that the person who stole the jewels must have been in the Castle that night, and have had opportunity of putting the drug, or draught, or whatever it was, into your hot water and into Deasy's night-cup. He must also have had some considerable knowledge of the habits of the household. Yes—there must have been an accomplice in the house," he continued, after a moment's silence,

during which he seemed to be musing over his difficulties. "That's the only possible solution. But which of 'em was it?—that's the rub, Mr. Hanmer. Upon my honor, I don't wonder that the opposite camp fixed on you—I'd have done it myself. Deasy's whimsical notion saved you a good deal, sir. By-the-bye, Mr. Hanmer, what of your suspicions of the Graf—are they still existent?"

"No," I replied. "They're not. I don't believe the Graf knows any more about the affair than any of us do. At least," I added, quickly correcting myself, "he did not know anything three days ago."

"Three days ago?" said Harland, giving me a quick glance. "That was the day of my arrival. Oh! well, what has made you alter your mind on that point, Mr. Hanmer, if I may ask?"

I hesitated about replying to him. Von Hofberg had spoken to me in confidence—had I any right to repeat the substance of his remarks to a third party? I thought the matter over: it seemed to me that I should be foolishly particular if I raised scruples of too great a nicety in respect to the Graf, and I eventually repeated the gist of our conversation to the detective. He nodded his head at two or three points of the story.

"Aye," he said, when I had finished. "I think you are right—we shall have to acquit him of the charge. So he has a clue, and he wants a partner? Very good—that gives us a little help—very little, Mr. Hanmer, but of some value all the same. About the partner, now,—

failing you, to whom would he go? Not to his high-and-mightiness who swigs and sleeps all day—no, the Graf's brains are themselves too clear to be allied with muddy ones. What about Jefferson?—he's a rather thickheaded ass, but he's devilish sly and cunning."

"Jefferson seems to have disappeared," I answered. "I haven't seen him for a day or two."

"All the more reason to suspect him," said he. "If von Hofberg asked you to go into partnership with him you may be sure that it was because he had business on hand which he couldn't carry out single-handed, and as you didn't rise to the bait it's extremely likely that he angled for Jefferson. There's one thing you may be sure of, Mr. Hanmer—if the Graf had succeeded in inducing you to help him, your career of usefulness would have come to a sudden termination as soon as you had found the jewels."

"I don't understand you," I said.

"It's easy enough to understand," he replied, laughing. "Men who employ help in that particular way throw it aside as soon as it becomes a mere encumbrance. In other words, you now stand a better chance of not being shot than if you had accepted the Graf's offer. Well now, let's see if we're any nearer things—if the Graf had a clue he will follow it up; we, therefore, must follow him up. If he wanted a partner, he will have obtained or be obtaining one; therefore we must find out who the partner is. I daresay we may make some-

thing out of the business yet, Mr. Hanmer. Finding a criminal is pretty much like finding the thimble in the children's game—you're generally nearer to the thing you're looking for than you dream of."

"But there's no one to call 'Hot' or 'Cold,' " said I.

"That makes it all the more exciting," said he. "And I'm not sure that there isn't, for instinct sometimes gives you tips that turn out well. Also, you never know when your fingers are going to close on the thimble. You see some strange things in my profession, Mr. Hanmer. I've known a man hanged just because he didn't notice that a door through which he passed had been newly painted, and another sent to penal servitude through forgetting to burn a scrap of blotting-paper. There was the Temple Baggage affair, now—"

He was proceeding, with unusual loquaciousness, to enlarge upon the details of that, his most famous case, when the waitress entered and informed me that the landlord of the 'Crown' was without and begged to see me for a moment. I excused myself to Harland and went into the hall—the man, obviously embarrassed, stood there looking as if something were occasioning him great perplexity. When he saw me his face brightened somewhat and he took a step forward, bowing very politely.

"Begging your honor's pardon," said he, hushing his voice to a whisper and looking about him as if we were both conspirators involved in some mysterious plot;

"did your honor know anything of where the little painter-gentleman might be at all?"

"Do you mean Mr. Carburton?" I said, wondering what was coming.

"Sure, I do, sir," he answered. "Devil a glimpse of him did we see these two days—it's two nights he didn't sleep in his bed."

"Let me see," I said. "I saw him on Wednesday morning driving off in a car—"

"Sure an' that was the last was seen of him, sir. Mickey Doyle it was that took him out that old Castle way, where he was in the habit of taking him every morning, and Mickey set him down at the cross roads and never put eyes on him again," said the man, nodding his head as he spoke. " 'Twas the little gentleman's custom to walk in of an evening and to eat his dinner at seven o'clock, but devil a bit of him came back, and we never seen him since."

"Well, I don't know anything about him," said I. "Here, come into the coffee-room a moment. Now, then," I continued, leading him inside and closing the door, "we can talk without interruption. Mr. Harland, here's another case for you—Mr. Carburton, the artist, has disappeared, and here's his landlord wanting news of him."

"Who is Mr. Carburton?" asked Harland.

I gave him a brief account of my acquaintance with the little landscape painter; then the landlord repeated

his story. Harland listened to both of us with obvious interest.

"Went off on Wednesday morning and never been seen since, and now it's Friday afternoon," said he, half speaking to himself. "Humph! Did he owe you anything?" he suddenly asked of the landlord. "Leave a bill behind him, eh?"

"Oh, just the smallest trifle, sir. His bills was always settled up every Saturday," said the landlord. "'Tis, is there anything happened to the little gentleman that's bothering me. Sure, there's all his clothes and things in his room there, and never a sight or sound of him since he went out saying he'd be in for his dinner at seven that night. I thought, perhaps, his honor here would know where he was."

"I haven't a notion of his whereabouts," I said. "He was to accompany me to Annalleen Castle this evening —I expected him about seven o'clock. Is there anything in his room that would give you any clue?"

As to that the man could not say. Harland, who had been listening in silence, rose from the table.

"You had better look through his effects," he said. "Here, I'll come with you, if you like—I'm a police officer. The man may have had an accident or come to some unfortunate end, and in that case you ought to lose no time in communicating with his relatives. Come with us, Mr. Hanmer."

The landlord made no objection—he was evidently

seriously concerned about the safety of his guest—and we went off with him, and in due course were ushered into the room which Carburton occupied. Ten minutes' examination of his effects and belongings sufficed to show that there was nothing amongst them that afforded any clue to his disappearance. Anything more innocent than the contents of his leather trunk, or of the articles of clothing scattered about the room or stored away in the drawers of the wardrobe, no one could imagine. There were no papers in the pockets of his various coats and jackets, and the only documents we found were some rough sketches of castles and churches.

We left the house with a suggestion to the landlord that he should keep silent on the point of Carburton's disappearance until we saw him again. Once outside, Harland turned to me and asked sharply:

"Why was I not told of this man before?"

"I really don't know," I answered. "I suppose it never occurred to anyone that his presence in the town could interest you."

"Bah!" he said. "What short-sighted fools most people are! This is the first bit of real scent I have sniffed at yet."

I stopped and gazed at him in astonishment.

"You don't mean that you suspect this man?" I said. "Why, he's an artist—a rather well-known man, I believe."

Harland looked at me as if my remarks were scarcely worth listening to. He rubbed his forefinger thoughtfully along the edge of his chin.

"Just tell me all you can about this man's habits," he said. "Don't miss out anything that you can remember. I want to know all that you know of him from the time you first saw him until you last set eyes on him."

We had strolled on to the bridge as we talked—leaning over the parapet I told him everything that I knew of Carburton. The story occupied some time in telling, and while it was being told Harland, after his wont, kept silence. The silence lasted for a few minutes after I had made an end.

"And so," said he at last, his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the brown pool beneath, "and so this man became intimate at the Castle, and made himself conversant with, at any rate, a good deal of the arrangements there? Very good. Mr. Hanmer, I'm going to drive out to the farm where Mr. Carburton kept his canvas and things—will you come?"

I accepted the invitation readily enough, and within a few moments we were driving away in a car. The detective kept silence all the way, and as he seemed to be in a peculiarly thoughtful mood I took good care not to break in upon his meditations. We were very soon at the little farmhouse which Carburton had used as a

storage room, and its mistress came out to the door to meet us. It was not difficult to get out of her all that it lay in her power to tell. Mr. Carburton had come there as usual on Wednesday morning, she said, and had taken his picture and the other things down to the river. He had been painting there all day: she had seen him at various times from the door of the house. He had come up for a cup of tea at four o'clock, according to his usual custom; after that he had gone on painting until it was nearly dark, and when he had finally carried his things back he had remarked to her that he had not quite finished his picture, and would have to spend an hour or two in the morning over it. After that he had said good-night and gone away, following the path along the river-side, just as he always did. That, according to her best recollection, was about nine o'clock—perhaps a little later. He had not come back. She had never set eyes on him since.

Harland expressed a desire to see the picture, and the woman, who had already recognized me as having previously visited the house in company with Carburton, readily consented to show it to him. She led us through the kitchen into a sort of parlor where the picture reposed on two chairs, with its face turned to the white-washed wall. On the table lay the artist's painting materials; close by stood the enormous umbrella and the camp-stool with which I had seen Carburton burdened more than once. Everything, said the woman, was just

as Mr. Carburton had left it. She always locked the door of the room when he had put his things away, so that no one would meddle with them.

Harland turned the picture round and looked at it long and critically. He replaced it in its previous position at last, and still keeping silence left the room and the house. After a word or two to the woman I hastened to join him. He was walking up and down in the garden outside, and looked extremely thoughtful.

"Well?" I said. "Do you make anything out of all this?"

"I've made out one thing," he answered. "I understood from you that this man Carburton was what you called an artist."

"Well?" I said again. "Isn't he an artist?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and something of a look of pitying contempt came into his face.

"I don't know what your standard of art is, Mr. Hanmer," he said. "The man's a mere dauber—an absolute amateur, and a bad amateur at that."

"Dear me!" I exclaimed. "I thought it rather nice work. But I confess I don't know much about art."

"You don't indeed," he said, with brutal frankness. "No—I don't think I should call you a great critic—you evidently love the pretty-pretty order of things. Nice bit of old castle, nice bit of river, nice bit of sky, nice girl in red shawl, nice suggestion of stage scenery, nice adherence to conventionality, eh? I should advise

you to buy up a few grocer's almanacs when you want to furnish your dining-room with pictures," he said, bitingly. "They'll suit your taste. Well—let's be going back."

He fell into a sombre silence, from which I did not dare to arouse him. It did not trouble me at all to hear that I was no judge of art. It had seemed to me that Carburton painted very well, but then, all that I knew of drawing or painting had been derived from some small practical acquaintance with the making and coloring of sketch-maps. What did trouble me was the new element of suspicion which had been introduced into the case by the disappearance of Carburton. It was easy to see that Harland's thoughts were already diverted into a new channel: he sat wrapped up in them all the way back to the town.

"Did I hear you say that you were going out to Annalleen to-night?" he said, suddenly turning upon me as we drew up at the hotel.

"Yes—you did," I replied.

"Oblige me by not talking of this before the servants," he said. "In fact, please don't mention it at all at present—not even to Sir Desmond Adare."

I gave him my promise, and left him to continue his journey into the town, where, I shrewdly suspect, he kept the telegraphists busy for a while. For myself I lounged away the rest of the afternoon until it was time to depart for Annalleen. To the last I clung to a

sort of conviction that Carburton would come, but when seven o'clock struck there was no sign of him, and I drove off firmly convinced that something had happened.

I spent a somewhat uncomfortable evening at the Castle, and more than once I found myself wishing that Carburton were there, so that he might have talked in his usual fashion. Sir Desmond was puzzled by his non-appearance. I, of course, refrained from telling my host of the events of the afternoon.

At half-past ten I left him, secretly glad to get away, and set off across the park by a path which led through a deep wood, on the outer edge of which stood the ruins of the old stronghold or tower which had formed a conspicuous object in Carburton's picture. It was a desolate and lonely spot at any time: in that grey, uncertain light it had a weird, awe-striking appearance which amply justified the country folk in calling it haunted. As I passed it by, staring at its crumbling parapets and gaping ruins, I was suddenly startled, almost to the verge of real fear, by a sound that seemed to come from within its walls. I stood rooted to the spot. It was several minutes before the sound came again, and this time I knew that I was listening to a human voice crying in muffled tones for help.

CHAPTER XXII

TRAPPED

WITH the sudden instinctive fear which brings a column to a halt if some unexpected sound comes out of the darkness of an unknown route, I paused, holding my breath and straining ears and eyes. For the full space of three minutes—an eternity in circumstances like these—there reigned about me a dead silence, broken at last by the gentle sighing of a light breeze which started into being among the topmost branches of the trees. There was nothing to be seen, that is, there was nothing but the gaunt outline of the ruined castle, rising grey and spectral against the sky and the stars, and the smoother edgings of the trees, closing around the rock on which the old stronghold stood. Through a vista of the woodland I caught a glimpse of the Shannon, a mere streak of light lying far off; my ears strained instinctively as if they fancied it possible to hear some murmur of waves along the strand. But there was really nothing to be heard or seen save the immediate things—the fringe of trees, the tumble-down walls and towers, the sighing night-wind. Certainly there was nothing that suggested the near neighborhood of anything human.

I was about to move forward, my foot was already lifted in the act, and I was beginning to breathe freely again, when the sound which had filled me with sudden alarm came to my ears once more. I pulled myself up sharply for the second time, my ears strained achingly at the sound. I heard it again and again, then followed a deep silence.

Wherever it was, and although I had now heard it three times, I could not assure myself that it came from one particular direction; the sound seemed to proceed from a far distance. It was indistinct, blurred, muffled. I could not decide anything concerning it with any positiveness. It might come from far away across the park, or the woods, or from the opposite bank of the river. I could not tell indeed if it was a man's voice or the voice of an animal. There was nothing coherent or distant about it; it was more like an inarticulate wail than the clear voice of a human being or the cry of a brute. But I was quite certain that whether it came from man or brute it was a cry for help.

Very slowly, treading down the grass as though I suspected the presence of innumerable snakes, I approached the ruins, and in the deep shadow of one of the towers in the Castle wall paused once more and listened for the recurrence of the sound. When it came again I started with the sudden shock of a surprising discovery. The sound proceeded from beneath me—of that I was as certain as that my fingers touched the lichened walls

of the Castle. I held my breath and strained my sense of hearing until my head was like to burst with the exertion. When I relaxed the effort I was assured that the voice was that of a human being, and that it came from some cavity or dungeon in the rock beneath the Castle.

The only thought which flashed into my mind on making this discovery was that some unfortunate person had fallen from the ruins into the lower parts of the Castle, and now lay waiting for succour. I began to examine my bearings as well as I could in the dim light, advancing along the walls and over the heaps of fallen masonry with extreme caution lest a false step should result in a broken limb. For several minutes I made my way here and there about the ruins, gradually approaching a lower level on the face of the rock. And at last, with a suddenness that made me jump, I heard the voice once more, and this time could distinguish it clearly.

"Help!"

It seemed to come from beneath my very feet, and bending down and examining the wall by which I was then working my way towards the foot of the principal tower I discovered that I was standing by what had evidently been a small, arched doorway. As I fumbled about its masonry with my hands the cry came again and yet again—it was clear that it proceeded from the interior of the tower. But it was still muffled and in-

distinct—I fancied, when it died away for the third time, that it tailed off into something like a cry of pain or a half-articulate sobbing.

I had a box of wax matches in my pocket—when I had struck one and thrown its feeble light in the low archway at which I stood I saw that it afforded no chance of entering the tower. It was almost entirely blocked up by fallen masses of masonry—it was just possible to see that it had at some time formed the entrance to a stairway, and had been hewn out of the solid rock. As I examined it the cry reached me again—this time, listening more intently than ever, I was certain that it died away into a miserable sobbing wail. The sound reminded me of the whimper of a dog which has been caught in a trap—there was something hopeless and despairing in its appeal.

I was now of an absolute certainty that some unhappy wretch was immured in the tower, and I continued my scramble around the base in the hope of finding some entrance to its lower apartments. There was much rubbish and a thick growth of shrub all about the lower story, and it was not until I had come to the foot of the rock that I was able to make out another arched doorway, almost hidden from observation by a clump of briar-bushes. I got to it with some tearing of clothes and scratching of hands, and improvising a species of torch from some papers in my pocket proceeded to examine it. It was clear that it formed an entrance to

the tower—there was no rubbish or débris to bar one's way, and though the air was damp, noisome, and decidedly forbidding, there was no doubt that it was still in use, for on holding my torch to the floor I found the unmistakable prints of recent footsteps.

As I stood there, gazing at these signs and wondering what they meant, the voice from within the tower cried once more for help and subsided again into despairing whimperings and sobbings. I now seemed to be much nearer to it, and I felt sure that my first theory respecting its cause was a correct one—viz., that some venturesome tourist had climbed the tower and fallen over, and now lay, probably badly broken, at the foot of the interior. I had gathered from casual observations of the structure that it had originally been one of three storeys—it was very probable that the floors and ceilings of each had disappeared, and that anyone falling from the top would descend to the bottom, the fall being possibly broken, not in the pleasantest fashion, by such pieces of masonry as still projected from the walls.

There was nothing to do but explore the passageway which led from the arched entrance and I set about manufacturing another torch from such scraps of paper as I happened to have in my pockets. It made but a poor illuminant, and for a moment I thought of retracing my steps to Annalleen for lights and help. But Annalleen was two miles off, across the park, and the

voice was insistent and full of appeal. I went forward cautiously—ere I had taken twelve paces the paper torch had burned itself out. I was obliged to have recourse to my matches—they made mere spots of light in the heavy, evil-smelling gloom. I kept advancing, however, and I found that the passage way sloped downwards a little and wound in and out a good deal. I would have given its weight in gold for a candle,—the matches made me impatient. I had to strike them continually, let them burn until I could feel the sting of their flame on my fingers, and while they were burning make what progress I could by their light. As my impatience increased I tried the experiment of lighting a match, throwing its tiny glare as far forward as possible, and then pushing on quickly over the stretch of pathway thus revealed. This plan answered my purposes better —I made good progress and met with no discouragement save a bump or two against the hidden twistings of the walls. I grew bold and pierced further forward each time, and then, as was only to be expected, my foolishness met with its deserts. Striding rapidly into the darkness as the match paled and went out I suddenly strode into nothingness. For the thousandth part of a second I knew that I was falling through space and clutching wildly at the foul air about me, that a deadly sickness of fear and horror seized upon and swamped me —then came a stunning blow which crashed all over my body, and brought with it a merciful oblivion.

I became conscious that someone was forcing something into my mouth—brandy. I felt a drop of it trickle over my tongue—then another—and a third; finally, a little stream ran along. It was like fire . . . I began to cough. A hand shook me . . . I heard voices which sounded far-off and indistinct. Very slowly I recovered sufficient of my scattered senses to make me aware that I was aching all over; that there was a peculiarly sharp, grating pain in my left arm; and that I felt as though somebody had wound swathes about my body after the fashion in which mummies are wrapped. And in the end I regained full consciousness and opened my eyes.

I have never been quite sure, from that day to this, whether I was or was not surprised to see von Hofberg and Jefferson standing near me. I think my first instinct was to examine my surroundings: I am certain, at any rate, that I looked about me and took in all the details of the scene in which I found myself before my confused brain even attempted to tell me what they signified. I saw everything there was to be seen: indeed, before I understood what they meant, just as one sees things in a strange room in which one suddenly wakes out of sleep and is for the moment dazed and uncertain about one's surroundings. And what I saw was this: I was in a vaulted apartment which had evidently escaped much of the wreck and ruin that had befallen the rest of the Castle; there were remains of rude at-

tempts at decoration on the walls, and the four pillars which supported the roof were ornamented at base and capital. To one of these pillars I was securely tied by a stout piece of cord—I saw it enwrapping my arms and legs before I felt any pressure from it. There was a sufficiency of light in the centre of the place—two lamps of the sort once used by railway porters stood on the floor, another swung from a hook in the ceiling. Beyond the centre of the apartment, that is to say beyond the small, square space within the four pillars, everything was wrapped in gloom—I did not see any trace of a doorway or an opening. There was the gleam of perpetual moisture on the pillars and on the vaulted roof—as I saw it my fingers instinctively groped for the one to which I was bound. The tip of my forefinger touched the stone—it was slimy, repulsive.

But these things made little or no impression on my confused senses—as I came back to the full possession of them I found myself gazing with unspeakable horror and dread at the three human beings who shared this evil-smelling place with me. Exactly facing me, and half-hanging, half-rolling from the pillar to which he was bound, I saw Carburton, a blood-stained cloth twisted about his disordered hair, and blood-stains crimsoning the ghastly white of his face. His head hung limp on his shoulders, and as I gazed more closely at him I saw that a handkerchief had been tied tightly about his mouth and chin, presumably for the purpose of keep-

ing a gag in its place. For a moment I thought he was fainting, but he presently raised his head and looked at me, and from me his glance turned to von Hofberg and Jefferson. It was not until I caught that glance that the full horror of the situation dawned upon me. The eyes were the eyes of a trapped animal; the glance that which such an animal turns on its slayer: it was full of despair, horror, utter hopelessness.

As for von Hofberg and Jefferson, they stood a pace or two away from me, watching me as I took in all these details of the scene. Von Hofberg betrayed no sign of any sort of emotion, Jefferson looked as sanctimonious as ever, but there was a gleam of covert satisfaction in his small eyes as he regarded me out of their half-closed lids. In his hands he held a long, slender rod of bright steel, which he was bending and straightening like a riding switch—it seemed to me that there was a curious restlessness in the motions of his fat, pulpy fingers. Von Hofberg was screwing on the lid of the flask out of which he had just dosed me with brandy: he completed the operation very deliberately, watching me all the time with steady, unflinching gaze.

"Well, Mr. Hanmer," he said at last. "So you have come round? That was a bad fall you had. If by some strange miracle you should be alive to-morrow you will feel its effects, I can assure you. However, I don't think you need fear unpleasant consequences of that kind; you blundered in more than one way when you made

that false step, Mr. Hanmer, and you know as well as I do that one must always pay for a mistake. But you will not have much to pay—only your life, and as that is about as worthless as it can be, you must admit that you will come off very well. Ah, my dear sir, you were greatly in error when you refused my offer the other day! I told you, did I not, that you were in the wrong? It is a pity you were not better advised, because it will put me to the trouble of shooting you presently, and I hate trouble."

I knew that the man meant every word that he said. I am not ashamed to say that a horrible fear seized upon me—a mental fear so intense, so dreadful, as to drive every bit of physical pain out of my body. I felt the sweat burst from me as my heart gave one convulsive leap; the next instant a scream rang out from my lips which set the place ringing, then another, and yet another. Ere a fourth came they had gagged me safe enough, and I hung back from my bonds, panting.

"Nervous, eh, Mr. Hanmer?" said the mocking voice, calm and collected as ever. "Well, that's the result of years of alcoholic excess. It may afford you some slight pleasure at this moment to reflect upon your evil courses; it is, I believe the usual thing to do when one comes to the parting of the ways. But stay, here is matter more amusing for you. Mr. Hanmer, let me introduce Mr. Neil Hartopp, whom you have hitherto known as Mr. Paul Carburton. Mr. Hartopp, my dear Mr. Hanmer,

is one of the cleverest thieves in the world, and it is he who has appropriated the famous amethyst and the valuable jewels. We are not quite sure how Mr. Hartopp managed this little coup, but we really do not mind that; it is not of so much importance to us as the fact that he did manage it. There is a matter of still greater importance, however—we have not yet succeeded in persuading Mr. Hartopp to tell us where the jewels are hidden. You perceive, Mr. Hanmer, that Mr. Hartopp is not in what one would exactly call comfortable circumstances at present. He has spent two nights and two days in this undesirable place, and his food has been very plain. He is a stubborn man, but there are limits to every one's patience, and mine, I fear, is exhausted. In fact, gentlemen—" here he bowed with mock politeness to both his prisoners—"I am obliged to bring all this to an end . . . and I will lose no more time in doing so."

He crossed over to the other man's side with two or three rapid steps. I saw the tortured wretch shrink in his bonds as this human devil drew near, and a look of unutterable loathing, hatred, despair, appeal, all mingled together in one swift glance, struck such terror to my heart as I had never known and shall never know again. I think a wild beast, springing on his prey, would have been affected by such a glance. Von Hofberg, calm as ever, showed no sign of emotion.

"Now, then, my man," said he, placing a hand on

the other's shoulder. "We are weary of this delay. We have given you plenty of time to think matters over. Indeed, we have been very indulgent to you. Now, we cannot wait any longer; we must bring this matter to a conclusion at once. Come, Hartopp, don't be a fool. It is useless to resist us further. You are as secure here as if we had you in the Bastile of blessed memory: nobody can help you, not even our friend Hanmer there, who is shortly to say farewell to his misspent life. Now, then, where are the jewels? Give me a sign that you will reveal the secret of their hiding-place and I will take the gag out of your mouth. I ask you once more—where are they?"

He drew out his watch and stood waiting, glancing alternately at it and at the man. The latter stared fixedly before him; at the end of what seemed to me to be quite a long time von Hofberg closed the watch with a snap.

"Very good," he said. "Then we will try a little persuasion. Hartopp, you see the steel rod which Mr. Jefferson holds in his hand, and you also see the lamp there. We are going to heat that steel rod to a very unpleasant degree of intensity in the flames of the lamp, and then we shall proceed to make some experiments with it upon your body, Hartopp. Mr. Jefferson, you may go to work."

Jefferson went to work without comment or waste of time. He took off the thick glass shade which protected

the flame of the lamp, wrapped a neckerchief about one end of the steel rod and thrust the other into the flame. I watched the steel change color—now it glowed fiery red, now a brilliant yellow, now a dull white. Jefferson withdrew it from the flame; von Hofberg took it from him. He faced Hartopp again, his right hand holding the steel rod. The wretch shrank and shrank within the already tightly-drawn compass of his bonds; his eyes glowed like live coals, and his face, hideously disfigured by the blood-stains, was livid with agony. Von Hofberg raised the glowing rod to within a few inches of the man's chin. I caught a faint hissing sound and saw the beard melting away in scarcely-seen smoke. Another instant and the muffled yell of a man in horrible agony broke through the handkerchief by which the poor wretch was gagged, and through the foul atmosphere of the dungeon there penetrated to my nostrils the smell of burning flesh.

"Merely a beginning, Hartopp," said von Hofberg. "It is not pleasant, is it, my friend? Well, but you are so stubborn. Once more—where are the jewels?—Still dumb?—then we must try a little harder. Jefferson, take off his shoes and stockings."

I could not keep my eyes from watching these horrors. Von Hofberg smiled as he walked over to the lamp and dipped the steel rod into its flame again.

"What a pity that men will not be content with moral persuasion!" said he. "It is repulsive to any man of nice

feelings to have to resort to this sort of thing. However—"

He sighed wearily and went back to his victim. Once more the muffled roar of agony . . . then the tortured wretch's strength of mind gave way, and his drawn face endeavored to give pantomimic expression of his submission. Von Hofberg dropped the steel rod . . . in another instant the gag was out of the man's mouth.

"Yes, yes!" he gasped, half choked. "Yes—I'll tell. Oh —water—for God's sake—water!"

Then his head fell forward, like a lump of wood. . . . I thought he was dead: his neck seemed to give way so suddenly, and his whole body appeared to collapse and shrink. But von Hofberg showed no concern; he drew out his brandy flask, and in a few moments the man came back to life. The brandy appeared to communicate fresh doggedness and defiance to him; for awhile he glared at his tormentors with fierce looks as if he still meant to resist them, but all the strength went out of his eyes and face when Jefferson, at a sign from von Hofberg, dipped the steel rod into the flame once more. His head dropped forward on his chest and he began to mutter: his captors went close up to him and listened. I could not catch a syllable of what he said to them, but within a few seconds they turned away from him. The man gave them another look of rage and hatred, then his head sank towards his breast again, and

he appeared to faint for the second time. Von Hofberg turned and looked at him. It must have been patent to the most careless of observers that the man was in need of help. But I knew by that time that neither he nor I need expect mercy of any sort from the two ruffians who held us securely at their disposal. I was indeed absolutely assured in my own mind of the imminence of my own death. I knew quite well that von Hofberg would never permit me to escape alive from that dungeon with his secret in my possession.

A curious change came over me; the horror which I had felt at first was replaced by a complete apathy as to my own fate. I watched the further operations of the two men with a feeling of peculiar inquisitiveness, pretty much, I think, as I might have watched a scene on the stage. After they had received what I took to be Carburton's or Hartopp's confession, they talked together in low tones for a few minutes; then Jefferson picked up one of the lamps and they passed away beyond the pillars into the further recesses of the dungeon, which I now found to be of considerable extent. I saw the glimmer of the lamp for some little time; then it suddenly disappeared, as if Jefferson and his companion had turned a corner. After that I listened, still with a strange apathetic feeling, to the convulsive breathing of the half-fainting man who faced me. He was now only kept in an upright position by his bonds. His head occasionally rolled from side to side; once or

twice he tried to lift it; once, it seemed to me, his eyes met mine in a stare of dazed recognition. . . .

Suddenly the crack of a revolver rang out through the heavy stillness of that accursed dungeon. It rang but once: sharp, clear, decisive. A series of rattling echoes followed, then came silence. The sound of the shot woke the other man out of his stupor; he lifted his head and looked at me again, and I saw his lips move. There was no articulate sound. His head dropped, and for the third time he collapsed, falling limply within his bonds.

The spark of the lantern reappeared in the gloom of the further recesses. It grew larger and brighter. Within another moment von Hofberg stepped into the clearer light of the area within the pillars. It gave me no surprise and scarcely another thrill of fear to find that he had returned alone.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SWIFT FEET OF FATE

I WAS now assured that for myself and for the man whom I had known as Paul Carburton the end of things was very near. I had no doubt whatever that somewhere in the further recesses of the dungeon Samuel Jefferson lay dead—the eloquence of that single revolver shot had been charged with a sufficiency of meaning. Bit by bit von Hofberg was working out his plans to a definite result: the next step in his path to final success would be the killing of Carburton and myself. That done, he would be free to go where he pleased, carrying his spoils with him. It was highly improbable that anyone would ever institute a search in these underground recesses—so far as I knew only the local people were aware of their existence, and they were too much afraid of the place to come near it. Everything was in von Hofberg's favor—the grey ruins of the old Castle would keep his secret for ever.

I watched him with a curious fascination as he came within the circle of the pillars. His every movement was deliberate—he set his lamp down on the floor, and taking a seat on some fallen masonry close by he drew

out a parcel from the pocket of his lounge coat and slowly freed it of its wrappings. The light from the lamps flashed and sparkled on the glittering things which he carefully counted and inspected ere he transferred them to a wash-leather belt, taken from his waist. There was something wickedly mocking in that light—the jewels might have been the eyes of devils laughing at human misery. As for the human devil who handled them, there was no mercy in the eyes which he presently turned upon me—they were as hard and unyielding as the stones for which one life had already been sacrificed.

"Well, Hanmer!" he said, nodding to me with great confidence, "here are the jewels, you see. What a pity that you did not enter into the partnership which I proposed to you—I do not think I should have terminated that partnership as I have just terminated that which I was obliged to form with the late Mr. Jefferson; for you, my dear Hanmer, are a man of some brains, and only need a little more confidence in yourself and a little more disregard of foolish prejudice to make a first-rate man of business. I believe you and I would have got on together, but that is now quite out of the question, of course. Now, my dear Hanmer"—he interrupted himself to light a cigarette—"I daresay you are full of wonder as to how I came to work out this matter, and before I shoot you—an unpleasant incident which your own foolishness has made an ab-

solute necessity—I will tell you just enough to satisfy your curiosity. When I made up my mind that you were not the thief I naturally cast about me for some likely person, and it suddenly occurred to me that our friend here was something of a suspicious character. He was posing as an artist—a very slight inspection of his picture, Hanmer, convinced me that he was a mere amateur, with just sufficient skill to trick a person like yourself. Observation of his movements following upon this discovery revealed the fact that he had a female accomplice in the Castle. Ah, my dear Hanmer, when one is executing any considerable movement it is not well to have an accomplice, or, at any rate, to retain his or her services when the need no longer exists. If our friend there had wrung the neck of Nancy Flynn's demure looking serving woman as soon as he and she had brought off their rather well-planned coup he might have been in safety at this moment and in possession of the jewels, which are now safely bestowed in my belt. A female accomplice is always a nuisance after her share of the work is done. She usually insists upon meetings after dark, and such meetings, Hanmer, may be witnessed. But I see you are somewhat mystified. To put matters into brief shape, my dear, sir, the true story of this affair is as follows: the person whom you see there in a very unenviable condition is one Neil Hartopp, a rather expert thief, who is, I believe, what they call 'wanted' by the police for various escapades. He

appears to have acted in league with Nancy Flynn's maid, the innocent looking Pattie, in this matter; and it is more than probable that if Jefferson had not kept an eye on her the other night and I had not done the same for him, they would have carried their project to final success. It is a great mistake, Hanmer, to discuss such matters as these two had to discuss in fancied privacy, and, moreover, in darkness. A man is never so much alone as in the midst of a crowd; no place is so full of ears as a wood at midnight; one is never in such danger as when one foolishly fancies one's self to be secure—"

I have always believed that there was some fate in his saying this; certainly, he could not have said anything more apropos of what immediately followed.

As I watched him, wondering at the devilish coolness of the man, the crack of another revolver rang out close by me—von Hofberg, who was sitting in a lounging, careless attitude, his cigarette dangling from his lips, suddenly straightened himself with a convulsive movement of his body. He half sprang to his feet, and his eyes glared wildly as they met mine for the thousandth part of a second: then he seemed to collapse as a house of cards collapses, and he rolled over on the floor and suddenly became very still. And with horror of this sudden and unexpected turn in the rapidly flowing tide of strange happenings I fainted.

When I came to myself again von Hofberg still lay

in a crumpled heap on the floor—between him and me stood Nancy Flynn's maid, Pattie, holding a revolver, and glancing from one feature to another of the strange scene upon which she had made such a dramatic entry. She lifted the lamp and threw its light on von Hofberg's face—it was easy to see from the distorted grin and fixed glare of the still, staring eyes that the man was dead. She put the lamp down again and hurried across to the wretch hanging in his bonds against the pillar. He apparently was still unconscious—his head rolled aimlessly from one side to the other as she began to unfasten the ropes by which they had secured him. She worked with fierce energy at this task, staring from him to me, from me to the dead man grinning at us from the floor, but she said no word until she unfastened the last of the knots. The man fell into her arms like a dead thing: she lowered him to the floor and bent over him, shaking him by the shoulders and calling him by name. I noticed then that she called him "Neil," and I remembered what von Hofberg had said.

Hartopp opened his eyes at last and begged for water —the girl looked round her with a despairing gaze. It suddenly seemed to strike her that there might be something drinkable on the dead man, and she presently approached his body and with an evident repugnance began to examine his pockets. She soon discovered the flask and went back to Hartopp with it. He was still faintly begging for water, and she forced the neck of

the flask between his lips and supported his head while he drank. In a few moments he opened his eyes, fetched a great sigh, and looked about him. The girl shook him gently. "Neil!" she said. "Here—come to! It's me—Pattie. Neil—what have they been doing to you; what's the matter with your hands and feet? Neil, I say, Neil —I've killed the German, anyway."

He stared at her as if he scarcely comprehended what she said, and she gave him another drink of brandy. He became gradually aware of his surroundings.

"Pattie!" he said, wonderingly. "Is it you, my girl? It was the German and Jefferson, and they knocked me down in the wood, just after I left you, and brought me here. It's days ago, that, I think. Where are they?"

"The German's dead—there," she said, pointing to von Hofberg's body. "I don't know where the other man is. I shot the German. What's he doing there?" she went on, nodding her head in my direction.

"I don't know," he answered, feebly. "They brought him in. Oh—my feet! They burnt me with a red-hot bar, and made me tell them where the stuff was hid. I expect von Hofberg's got it."

"He's dead, I tell you!" she exclaimed. "See, he's there. Lucky I knew where you'd hidden it—when I couldn't hear of you I came to see if you'd lifted it and gone off. You'd not be here long, I guess, from what that brute was saying—he was going to shoot both of you. Now,

then, Neil, let's be getting out of this—I believe Harland's on your track."

"Curse him!" said he. "I wish we'd cleared at first. See if you can bandage my feet, Pattie. I can't walk like this. I've had neither bite nor sup since they brought me here—I'm as weak as a child," he wailed, feebly.

"Sh!" she said. "Don't make that noise—let's get off as quick as we can. Where's Jefferson?"

"I believe von Hofberg shot him," he answered. "I heard a shot."

"Then they're both out of the way," she said, in reassured accents. "Now, then, Neil, pull yourself together. Let's see what I can manage for you."

She gave him another drink of brandy, and then began to bustle about with vigorous, decided movements. She took a handkerchief from von Hofberg's pocket, and tearing it into strips proceeded to bandage Hartopp's hands and feet with great skill: she drew on his socks and shoes as gently as if she had been a mother attending upon her child: she soothed him when he winced and complained, and at last she got him on his feet, looking very much worn and shaken. The man drew a deep breath and looked about him. His gaze fell on the prostrate form of his principal tormentor—he lifted his foot and kicked the dead face three times, savagely and deliberately.

"I wish I had had him tied up for an hour before you sent him to hell, my girl!" he said. "He was a devil, he

was! Let's see if he's got the things on him—I think I went clean off when they tortured me into telling 'em where they were."

He rolled the body over with his foot and stooped down to examine it—a moment's search brought the belt to light, and Hartopp secured it carefully about his own waist. He kicked the dead man again as he turned away from him.

All this time I had been aware of a growing curiosity as to what these two would do with the unwilling witness of these proceedings. Up to now they had scarcely looked at me, but when they had finally secured their booty and there was nought further to do they began to look at me and then at each other in a way I did not like. And at last the woman spoke.

"What's to be done with him?" she said, meaningly. "I guess he knows pretty nearly everything, doesn't he, Neil?"

The man nodded his head; there was something sullen in his glance, and he seemed to keep his eyes away from mine.

"Then there's only one thing to be done," she said in a calm, even voice. "You'll have to put him away. Here, take my revolver, and get it over."

She pushed the revolver into his hand as she spoke; he fingered it nervously, and his face assumed a scowl.

"I don't like it," he said. "There's been enough blood hereabouts—I'm not going to put him away."

She broke into a scornful laugh.

"You fool!" she said. "He'll give us away if you don't. Do you think he'd be as nice as you are about it?"

But Hartopp hesitated. She uttered a sharp exclamation and tried to take the revolver from his hand.

"Here, give me it," she said, impatiently.

"No," he said. "I'm not going to have it. Let's leave him where he is—there's never a soul comes near this place—they say it's haunted."

Then if I could I would have cried out. They saw that I was struggling to speak, that I tried to burst my bonds, and they watched me with a sort of malignant curiosity in their eyes. For some moments there was silence, broken only by my muffled pantings.

"Come along," said Hartopp, at last. "He's safe enough there."

Then, leaning on the girl's arm, he began to shuffle painfully away. In another moment they had disappeared in the gloom; I heard the sound of their steps gradually die out: a heavy silence settled down over the tomb which I shared with the two men who were already dead, and whose end had been mercifully robbed of the terror which now threatened to oppress my own.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DOG

IF I had not been so effectually gagged as to render the performance of such a thing absolutely impossible I believe I should have burst into violent howlings of despair on seeing Hartopp and his companion desert me. For a few moments I was almost beside myself with rage, fury, and the sense of awful helplessness. I struggled to free my body from the bonds which secured it to the pillar, and it was only when I realized that I was beyond all hope of release that I grew calm. It was useless to struggle or to indulge in muffled groanings; there was no one to hear the latter, and no hand to aid the former: I was as securely entombed as if I had been immured in the heart of one of the Pyramids.

By degrees I grew calm, and I began to think the whole matter out. I was bound to the pillar by cords which secured every bit of my body from shoulders to ankles, and though I could move my head and my hands in circumscribed limits I could get no help from either. As regards physical discomfort, mine was a bad case; my head ached and throbbed; the pressure of the cords about the fleshy parts of my arms was painful, and I

was conscious that I had suffered some severe injury in my fall. During the exciting incidents which had followed my return to consciousness after my sudden descent into the dungeon I had been too much concerned with mental problems to take any note of physical pain, but now that matters had lapsed into a quiescence which seemed likely to lie heavy about me and my surroundings for ever, I became keenly aware of every smart in my body; and although little more than half-an-hour appeared to have elapsed between my restoration to a full perception of things and the final retreat of Hartopp and the girl, the confined position in which I was placed was already threatening me with cramp. A burning sensation in my head was accompanied by the first symptoms of a dry thirst, while the pressure of the cords about my body made my feet and hands ache violently. I endeavored to lean against my bonds in order to lessen the pressure, but without avail; they had been tied too tightly to admit of any relief, and the rigor and discomfort of my position had been increased by the fact that my captors had drawn the rope round the capital of the pillar in such a fashion as to almost lift me off my feet. In point of fact I just touched the floor with the tips of my toes, and there was consequently a drag on the rest of my body which increased in painfulness as every moment passed by.

I have often thought since this thing happened that if I had fully realized the horror of my situation at the

time, nothing could have saved me from losing my reason. I believe that the unpleasant fact that I was securely gagged helped me to preserve my senses. If I had had the power to do it, I should have screamed and yelled and shouted, and probably howled like a trapped beast until reason had fled. There have been times since the recovery of my health at which I have suddenly remembered the scene wherein I was the only living thing, and have turned sick, and shivering, and worse, at the mere recollection. For there I was, a living man, securely bound to a pillar in a dungeon, which for anything I knew to the contrary might be very deep in the earth and only accessible by secret ways, and which, moreover, lay beneath a ruin of such evil reputation amongst the country folk that none of them would venture near it even in the broadest daylight. Before me, so near that I could have touched it with my foot had I been able to move that member, lay the body of von Hofberg, the grinning face mutilated and bruised by the savage kicks which Hartopp had bestowed upon it, the body crumpled up in the helplessness of sudden death. That sight was horrible enough, but I am not sure that I was not much more horrified and frightened by the knowledge that Jefferson's dead body lay somewhere amidst the further recesses of the place. What lay exactly before my eyes I could grow familiar with; what I could not see assumed terrible and soul-affrighting shapes in my imagination. As I thought of my ex-orderly lying there,

dead, and in some cramped position of horror, a motionless object in a cloud of blackness, I began, I think, to grow a little delirious, and something prompted me to indulge in wild fancies about his re-appearance. I strained my eyes in the direction in which he had gone away with von Hofberg; it was only by a violent effort that I put away from me the thought that his ghost might suddenly grow out of the gloom.

They had left the lamps burning. I found fresh food for reflection in wondering how long their light would illumine my prison. One of them was burning low already; the unpleasant smell of the wick came to my nostrils and made me feel sick. It seemed to me from the appearance of the others that they might last for several hours—perhaps for twenty-four. I began to wonder how I should fare when the most enduring of them flickered and went out; and with that vague, indefinite sense of the extreme curious which comes over one at times like these, I fell into a morbid speculation as to which would be preferable in that place—the light or the darkness.

The pain in my head and limbs grew duller, less sharply defined, as time passed on. It was very still down there—for a long time I did not catch a sound. It came upon me at last that I could hear the silence—my ears pricked themselves lest they should lose anything of what it had to tell me. There was something soothing in its rhythmic monotony—something that

acted like a sedative on my nerves. I closed my eyes and I think I fell asleep.

I woke with a sudden horror that drove a cold sweat out of my cramped body and left me trembling in every muscle and fibre. Something was moving somewhere near at hand.

I lifted my head and listened, straining my sense of hearing as one strains it at a strange sound in the night. I heard it plainly, a soft, stealthy movement as of padded feet falling gently and uncertainly on a floor thick with long undisturbed dust. Now and then the footfalls came swiftly—now they ceased altogether—now they came again slowly and diffidently. Sometimes they were on my right, sometimes on the left, and then they were in front, away amongst the shadows; after a time they sounded behind me, and then again on my right. When I heard them behind me I could have screamed with uncontrollable terror, but for the gag.

This sound went on for some little time—it came nearer at last and was joined with the breathing of an animal. It became still clearer, and very suddenly I was aware of two bright spots of green flame glaring at me from the darkness which lay immediately before me and beyond the circle of the lamp light. They remained absolutely motionless for some moments, but I became aware at last that the animal out of whose head they shone was drawing nearer. It was easy to feel certain that they were the eyes of an animal which were glaring

at me out of the darkness: I was certain, too, that the animal was a large one. If I had been further down the steep descent to delirium along which I was being forced so rapidly, I should, I suppose, have fancied these terrifying eyes to have been those of some awful monster which had emerged from the recesses of the dungeon; as it was I was still clear-headed enough to know that this was a dog.

The brute came out of the darkness at last, his flaming eyes fading into sombreness as he emerged with a slow, slinking, half-bold, half-frightened gait into the circle of the lamps. He stared at me out of his eye corners, and I caught the gleam of a flash of light on the whiteness of a bared fang—he was for all the world the incarnation of sneaking brutality ready to spring and rive and tear. He was a great beast—loose and long of limb, unkempt, a sheep-dog that appeared to have been cut adrift from respectable pastoral life and orderly occupation, and to have since led a free-booter's career in the woods and fields. I would have laid a million to a china orange that he was a sheep-killer—there was murder all over the gaunt, half-starved body which slowly slunk into the light, and to my disordered imagination it seemed as if the beast's fangs were even then dripping with blood.

As I watched him he slunk nearer and nearer to the dead man who lay, uglily still, on the floor between him and me. He kept his eye on me as he nosed the ground

before him, and he presently began to complain against my presence there. His complaint came in peevish snarlings and grumblings rather than in honest growling; there was something as viciously querulous in his voice as if it had been that of a backboneless, ill-conditioned tramp who objected to anyone watching him eat a crust of bread by the wayside. He continued to nose the air and to grumble as he slunk nearer and nearer to the body. Something in his action made me feel all the sensations of nausea—he had got down almost onto his belly, and at the last his slinking movement was transformed into something like the gliding of a snake over the ground.

For a moment after he reached the dead man he remained at his side, perfectly quiet, his eyes watching me as though he expected a word or a sudden blow. It gradually impressed itself upon me that the beast knew that he had nothing to fear from the motionless thing lying before him: it was I, the still living man, of whom he was afraid, and whose movements and glances he dreaded. It made me sick to think of it—there was something so thoroughly bestial in the situation.

He began to sniff, then to grumble again; into the sound thus made came another—he was lapping up, greedily and with the gluttonous avidity of the brute, the blood which had gathered in a pool about the dead man's face and head. He lapped and lapped, mouthing and chavelling with animal rapacity, and he grumbled

at me all the time. I saw his white teeth gleaming through the crimson which began to stain his long, pointed nose and jaws, and above them the brighter gleam of his sneaking eyes perpetually fixed upon me as though he were not yet certain whether it were beyond my power to drive him away.

After some moments he slunk off to a little distance. He began to exhibit symptoms of impatience and distress, moving about in a restless fashion and giving vent to his feelings in short, sharp barks of resentment and anger. He sat down on his haunches and whined, tossing his snout about as a dog will when he is moved. And in the end he went back to the dead man, still sneaking and grumbling and whining, and this time he growled at me defiantly as he fell to work, and I knew that he was no longer capable of restraining his hunger.

I was not minded to see even an enemy like von Hofberg made food for dogs, and I closed my eyes and tried to shut out the scene before me. But I could not shut my ears, and I was obliged to hear the sounds of the brute's gluttony and savagery mingling with his growling and snarling. It was not for a long time that I dared to open my eyes again—in fact I kept them closed until I heard the maneater shuffling away in the darkness, and then I only opened them in order to see what his movements were. He went away, still skulking, and I heard him licking his lips as he vanished beyond the ring of light. Everything became very silent. . . . I kept my

eyes firmly turned away from the torn and mangled thing at my feet. Somehow, I felt something like pity for it, senseless though it was—against the brute slinking away from it I experienced a foolish, unreasonable anger. I would have strangled him if I could have thrown off my bonds and seized him by the throat.

I do not know how long it was between this episode and the going out of the lamps. They went out at various times, but within a short period of each other—I am not sure that I knew how I felt about the final disappearance of the last glimmer of light, or if I were conscious that darkness was at last upon me. I think I became delirious or unconscious—according to what I learnt afterwards I must have been mercifully deprived of all knowledge of my surroundings for the greater part of my enforced stay in that accursed place. But there is one thing still clear to me—the recollection of waking out of my consciousness at some period of my captivity, of remembering where I was, and of seeing the dog's eyes glaring into mine from the blackness which wrapped us in. After that came oblivion.

CHAPTER XXV

THE GOLDEN SPUR

IT was early in July when the events of which I have already written came to a sudden termination so far as my immediate knowledge of them was concerned, and before I cared to hear any more of what had subsequently happened to me or to those mixed up with me in these adventures, the summer had slipped away and the autumnal tints were spreading across the hills and valleys. After the fashion of the heroes whom popular novelists lead into fearful situations in order that they may be rescued therefrom at the psychological moment, I was saved from death; but I do not know and do not care to know how much nearer I had drawn to it than when I first heard the soft footfalls of the dog in the dust of the dungeon. I have often seen the dungeon in dreams since, and there are times when I see the dog's eyes and hear his bestial mouthings of the dead man; and I suppose that in the years to come I shall often wake from my sleep and thank God that these things are dreams and not stern reality. What it exactly was that was found at last in the dungeon, and how they nursed it back not only to life but to reason, I do not wish to

know. All that I know is that when someone happened to see the dog enter the ruins and had the curiosity to follow him, and find out what he was doing there, and what had changed a hunted, starved beast into a well-fed looking animal (for he was a notorious sheep-killer, whom the neighboring folk had been chasing for days), I had been secured to the pillar for a week, and had long since lost my reason under the strain of that awful durance.

The merciful madness which had fallen upon me was followed by a condition of dull, apathetic acquiescence in things around me which caused more distress to those who nursed me back to life and sanity than my first sore state. I am told that for a long time after the doctors had pronounced me out of danger, and even for some time after they declared me to be once more in possession of my senses, I betrayed no knowledge of certain familiar faces which hovered about my bedside, and evinced no disposition to ask questions. I was numb and dumb—it was only when I dozed or fell asleep that those watching by me were sometimes frozen with terror at the sudden shriek or groan which showed that the horrors of my recent situation were still circling about my enfeebled brain. If I realized anything during that period it was that I was very tired, very sorely wounded. I have faint recollections, indeed, of wondering what it was that had befallen me and that had crushed me mentally and physically. But it was seldom that I ever

thought of anything; although I was conscious that I was alive, I possessed no energy for any mental process: to lie like a log, inert and passive, was all that lay within me.

I passed out of this state somewhat suddenly. I had for some time been fully aware that I was back at Annalleen, and I had recognized one day, with something of a feeling of curiosity, that I was not in the room which I had formerly occupied there, but in a larger and brighter one. I recognized faces, too—those of the Princess, of Sir Desmond, of Deasy, and I became familiar with that of a man who appeared to take a considerable and a very curious interest in me, and whom I afterwards discovered to be the doctor. Another face which became very familiar in the later days was that of my nurse. I believe that as I grew stronger—if there could be any comparative degrees of strength in a man who had been literally snatched from the jaws of death —I began to wonder why I did not see Nancy Flynn. They say that I often used to look about the room in a wondering fashion as if I were searching for some one. It may be that it was mere vagary on my part, and yet I believe I wanted to find her even in my numb and dumb condition.

It was on a September day, bright, full of autumnal lights and shadows, that I began to show something like interest in my surroundings. For some days I had spent

an hour or two out of the few during which I was really awake on a lounge near the window. The browns and reds and yellows of the trees across the park had interested me in the same fashion, I suppose, as colors interest a child: at any rate I had lain there watching them without comment, with nothing indeed but a dumb appreciation of them for several days before I spoke of them. And it was not of them that I spoke at first; for on this particular day, as I lay watching the sunlight playing across them, there came to me through the open window the scent of a fragrant cigar, and it woke memories which other things seemed powerless to arouse. I did not know that there was anyone else in the room, and I spoke quite unconsciously, voicing instinctively the thought which flashed into my mind as I caught the smell of the tobacco.

"I wish to Heaven they'd give me a cigar!" I said.

I was astonished at my own strength and also at my own feebleness. It had been in whatever amount of mind I possessed that I should never be able to speak again; now that I had spoken I was frightened to find that my voice sounded far away and very weak. But I had no time to think much; before the words were well out of my lips a soft footstep sounded at my side, and I turned my head and saw one of the strange faces which had become familiar—that of the nurse.

"So you would like to smoke a cigar?" she said, and I

was glad she did not say it in that but-you-really-mustn't talk fashion which so many nurses adopt. "The scent attracts you?"

"I don't know how long it is since I had a smoke," I said. "But I'd like one now, even if it were a cigarette."

She made no answer, but she went quietly out of the room, to return presently with a cigarette and a box of matches. It was a very mild pinch of American tobacco which helped me to renew my loves with the genial goddess, but I smoked it through, and felt all the better for it. And while I was smoking it in came Sir Desmond Adare.

I have often thought since of the excellent sense which he showed upon this occasion. He neither stole into the room on tiptoe, as if he were afraid of waking a sleeping baby, nor advanced upon me with an awe-struck expression, as if I had been a rare curio in a glass case, nor spoke to me in a hushed whisper, as though the Grand Llama sat before him in mystic grandeur. Instead, he came up with outstretched hand and genial smile, sat down and chatted about the beauty of the afternoon, stayed exactly five minutes, made an excuse for his departure, and went off. The cigarette and his visit gave me an accession of strength, and dull and vague as my feelings still were I knew that I was climbing the hill to convalescence.

And at last there came a day when I was considered strong enough to be allowed to talk of what had hap-

pened. Harland came over from London; to him, to Sir Desmond, and to the latter's solicitors I told my story in much briefer fashion than it has been set down here. They, in still briefer fashion told me of my rescue, at the end of a week's imprisonment, and of their discovery of the remains of von Hofberg and of Samuel Jefferson. They told me also that much news of the events had been gathered from my delirious ravings, and that the suspicions which had been formed by the joint disappearance of Carburton or Hartopp and Pattie Moore had been confirmed by what I had said of them at disjointed intervals.

"And there, Mr. Hanmer," said Harland, who had told me most of the story, "there we come to an end. Everything possible has been done. We have raised the hue and cry for these two all over the world, and it has so far been without result. They have disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed them."

This was a surprise which I had never expected, and for that time the doctor, who was present, and kept a watchful eye on me, would allow no further conversation on the matter. But afterwards, as my strength increased, Adare and I talked much of it, and formed many conclusions and theories. In plain truth, however, the thing was a mystery: at the end of three months after their disappearance, Hartopp and his accomplice were still unheard of.

There were other matters to engage my attention at

this time. I guessed instinctively as I grew in strength that there had been various happenings at Annalleen during my illness, and that amongst them was the marriage of Sir Desmond and the Princess, and so I was not surprised when he brought her to see me one afternoon, and introduced me to his wife. He was very kind and thoughtful about it, and he showed a fine consideration when he made some excuse for leaving us together.

"It is not the first time you have been left in my wife's charge, though," he said, laughingly. "I can assure you she has gained a right to a diploma in nursing, and I shall have no hesitation in recommending her for honors."

Then he went away. A silence fell upon both of us—as for me, I think my physical weakness made me mentally strong.

"Our adventure has ended in a poor way, I fear, Mr. Hanmer," she said. "Will you ever forgive me for leading you into this?"

I tried to laugh, and succeeded in forcing a would-be cynical smile.

"Princess," I said, "do you think I am the sort of man who would be led into anything?"

Then she laughed too, and a certain awkwardness in the situation was saved. "You are fonder, perhaps, of having your own way," she said, with a sly touch of roguishness. "But, after all, Mr. Hanmer, had it not been for me you would not have gone through these horrors,

and I shall never forgive myself if they leave a trace upon you."

"As to that," said I, "I think it was Nancy and I who perhaps led all of us into difficulties. We were too much in love with the romantic side of our adventure—and Nancy's demure maid was very clever, Princess; and the sight of your jewels was no doubt very tempting to a young woman whose lover happened to be an accomplished cracksman. And so amethyst and jewels are gone —and I have failed."

"There is one thing in which you made a great success," she murmured, averting her face from me.

"I am glad to hear it," I answered, "but I can't guess at it, and must think it to have its chief existence in your kind thought of me."

"Oh, but it is real!" she cried. "It—do you not know that when that dreadful scene happened in which I—I drew off my ring, I meant—"

"My memory is bad," I said. "I have forgotten."

She gazed at me strangely and for some time. I affected a complete indifference. "I meant to break with Sir Desmond," she said at last; "and now—I want to thank you for preventing it. If you had been less prompt in sending him into that room to me, he—he would not have seen me again. And I shall never feel sufficiently grateful to you, for doing what you did."

It had to be said, and I had to listen, and I knew that she was saying the things that lay deep in her heart, and

that she wished me to know of them. And suddenly, whether it was because I felt that I too must answer her frankness with an equal frankness, I spoke to her as freely as she had spoken to me, and with absolute calmness, and I should not have cared if her husband had stood there to hear what I said.

"Then I am rewarded," I said to her. "And I am glad you have told me this, for now I know that you have married the man you love and who loves you, and that all will be well with you. I am very glad, and I am satisfied."

She rose then and held out her hand, and I kissed it once, and my heart said good-bye to her, although my lips said nothing. And after that she sat down again at the side of my couch, and began to talk of other matters, and principally of Nancy, who, it appeared, had been obliged to leave for town before my return to convalescence, but who was kept in daily news of my progress. It appeared, too, that Nancy had kept up an almost perpetual attendance on me during the days when I lay so near death that no one expected my return to life, and that she had steadily refused to leave me, although more than one urgent matter required her presence, until I was out of danger. And for the rest of that afternoon and during many afternoons that followed we talked much of Nancy Flynn.

. . . . . .

There are now but three more matters to speak of be-

fore I bring this story to a close. The first is of how and with what hopes and prospects I left Annalleen; the second, of what two women said to me; the third, of the fate of the man and woman who left me to one of the most terrible deaths, and of the punishment which fell upon them in their turn.

I came back to strength with some rapidity at last, and ere October was out I was beginning to feel weary and restless. My host and hostess treated me with a rare hospitality, but they had the sense to see that when I finally announced my intention of leaving them it would be no kindness on their part to attempt to detain me longer. And so it was settled that on a certain day I should leave the scene of this curious adventure and go back to London. I confess that until then I had scarcely thought of what was coming next: I had been content to let things come as they might. But on the eve of my departure Adare spoke of the matter to me as we sat in the smoking-room, and spoke of it plainly and straightforwardly, and with no beating about the bush.

"Hanmer," said he, "I owe you a good deal more than I can ever do for you will repay, and during your illness, or rather since you got over the worst of it, I have been endeavoring to discharge some part of my debt to you in the only way you would allow. If you will accept it there is a post waiting for you in South Africa which will afford you the chance of sharing in empire-building there, of making a name for yourself, and of

living an honorable and prosperous life. I have so arranged everything that all that is now necessary is for you to tell me whether you accept or decline, and then proceed to the Cape when you feel quite strong enough to do so. What do you say?"

"Do you consider me fitted to this post in every way?" I said. "I rely on you."

"I do," he answered.

"Then I shall accept your offer," I said, "and I shall thank you for giving me a new start in life by taking good care to use it to full advantage."

Thus it was that whereas I had reached Annalleen a penniless adventurer, I went away from it the holder of a position of responsibility, able to hold my chin in the air, and to feel that henceforth I should be able, God helping me, to walk without shame before my fellows.

. . . . . .

I said good-bye to Adare and his wife with little more than the usual cordiality of friends, and with no reference to the recent events. It was understood that I should pay them a visit on my first leave home, and that they should visit me if they came to South Africa, an event which seemed very probable. We parted, then, pretty much as friends part who expect to see each other again shortly, and it was the parting that I most desired. But just before I left, the Princess, seizing an opportunity, handed to me a sealed envelope, addressed to me in her own handwriting, and bade me not to open

it until I had left Ireland. Thus for some hours I carried it in my breast pocket. It was not until we were clear of Kingstown pier that I opened and read what she had written to me. And this is what she said:—

"My friend, there is waiting for you in London the greatest treasure this world can give to a man—the loving heart of a true woman. How long it has been yours, and only yours, only itself has the right to tell you. Think well before you refuse to take it, but do not forget that whether you take it or not, it is yours for ever. That you will take it and keep it nobly and truly, is the prayer of your friend

"AMIREL."

And that was what one of the two women said to me, and every word came like a flash of white light. Oh, foolish and blind that I had been, wasting the years in gathering the chaff, never dreaming, never guessing that a child may keep its heart for a man; putting away from me the life beautiful when at last I was permitted to look adown its opening vistas, indulging useless dreams when close at hand a sweeter reality lay open to me, what did I deserve but that I should be despoiled of all of which I might have been possessed! Of what strange stuff are we men formed that we are for ever sighing and longing for the things that are not ours, and that we turn heedless and careless from the things that, did we but know it, are better worth possession?

As to what the other woman said, shall I set it down?

You may be sure that if I do I shall cheat you of the better part of it: for there was no man yet ever set down all the things a woman said to him in the sweetest moment of life. And indeed, strange as it may seem, I do not remember all that either of us said—or, if I do, I have locked them all away in such a secure muniment-room of my memory, that I do not care to entrust others with the key. But this much I will say—they talk much of the vagaries of love—now, it is certain that although I had thought of Nancy until that moment but as of a very dear friend, I had no sooner realized all that the Princess's letter meant than I was suddenly so filled with love for her that I laughed aloud to think that I had never known it before, and that I could ever have dreamed that I had a thought of another. And I went to her without a thought of any woman but herself in my heart.

She was alone, and she looked at me as she gave me her hands, and I knew as I looked at her that she knew what had happened to me, and that a great wave of such gladness as only a woman can feel who knows at last that the man she loves is hers and all hers welled up in her heart and flooded her life. And of what we said at that time I am not going to say anything. But later, when we came to talk of the things which are called serious, there was a conversation between us of which I may speak. I had spoken of my approaching departure for South Africa, and she sat mute at my side,

and her eyes looked anywhere but at me. But at last she turned them on me with a flash of the old spirit.

"I hate that you should go!" she cried, and stamped her foot. And then her mood changed, and her lips, close to my ear, whispered—"unless—unless I go, too, Cosmo."

Heigh-ho! These are the times when a man had needs be made of iron. I tried hard to be strong.

"Dear," I said, "I shall prove my love for you all the more if I make myself wait for you until I have at least shown that I am worthy of you. Listen to me, Nancy—let me go out and make my probation. Let me serve at least a year—after all, a year is—"

"Only a year," she said. "But, Cosmo—what if—what if—"

"Yes?" I said, and drew her closer. "Yes?"

"What if—" she whispered, shy now as in the old days when she was a slip of a child and used to stare at strange folk with dropped eyelids and her finger in her mouth, "what if one has waited since—since always?"

It may be that some folk thought we married in haste, and that the famous Miss Selma St. Clair was a fool when she gave up her career, after five years of brilliant success, to link her fortunes with those of a poor man; but the thoughts of other people have so far possessed no interest for Nancy or for me. We have been too much engrossed with new duties, far too much interested in ourselves to give much heed to outside matters

or to the opinions of a world which seems very far away. But some months after we reached Cape Town there came to us a letter from Sir Desmond Adare, a certain passage in which made me forget everything for the moment, and which I shall quote here in fulfilment of my promise to tell you what became of the man and woman who left me to die in the dungeon of the old ruin.

"I have something of great interest to communicate to you," the passage ran. "The mystery of the jewel robbery is solved. It has been found necessary, in consequence of frequent falls of masonry, to take down the ruined castle in which you discovered Hartopp and where we found you, and after inspecting the place I decided to have it thoroughly examined. No one had any idea that it contained such a vast number of underground passages; they communicated with various parts of the desmesne . . . in one of them, leading towards a little-frequented point of the river, we found two bodies. It was impossible to identify them—I spare you the details, but they had been eaten by water-rats. It is thought that these two had been overcome by some poisonous gas: how their exact end came it is impossible to tell. That the bodies were those of Hartopp and the woman Moore there is no doubt, for the missing jewels were discovered on that of the former—all of them, that is, except the amethyst. Of that there was no trace . . . it seems to have disappeared for ever,

and my wife and I are not sorry, considering everything, that it was not to be found. You may have heard—I suppose you have—of the legend of the amethyst, i. e., that it brought luck to its possessor. It seems to me that it brought bad luck to those who obtained possession of it by fraud or violence, and as it is extremely unlikely that Prince Adalbert will ever marry, Amirel conceives that the Amavia amethyst has become as extinct as the ancient house whose name it bore is too likely to be, ere many years are over."

THE END

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